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THE
WAY THAT LEADS TO GOD

THE WAY THAT LEADS TO GOD

PRACTICAL COUNSELS FOR THOSE WHO ASPIRE AFTER TRUE PIETY

BY

THE ABBÉ A. SAUDREAU

DIRECTOR OF THE MOTHER-HOUSE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD AT ANGERS

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY

LEONORA L. YORKE SMITH

TRANSLATOR OF "THE GRACES OF INTERIOR PRAYER;" "THE WAY OF THE CROSS OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS"

REVISED BY

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OF ERDINGTON ABBEY

NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO

BENZIGER BROTHERS

PRINTERS TO THE HOLY APOSTOLIC SEE

1911

SULLIVAN BEQUEST

Nov. 1911
M

Nihil Obstat.

F. OSMUNDUS, O.F.M.,

Provincialis Censor Deputatus.

Imprimatur.

EDM. CAN. SURMONT,

Vicarius Generalis.

Westmonasterii,
die 13 *Martii*, 1911.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

"SHOW, O Lord, Thy ways to me, and teach me Thy paths. Direct me in Thy truth and teach me, for Thou art God my Saviour, and on Thee have I waited all the day long" (Ps. xxiv. 4, 5). Does the fervent soul exist which has not sent up this, the Psalmist's, prayer a thousand times to God? He who has begun to "taste and see that the Lord is sweet" desires to possess Him. You know what this desire is, dear reader. You have often asked what you ought to do, what obstacles you ought to overcome, what road you should follow in order to attain to the possession of God in so far as is possible in this life. I am going to try to instruct you in this, and the lessons which I shall set before you will be drawn from Holy Scripture, from theology, and the teachings of the Saints.

Spiritual reading supplies one of the most efficacious means of sanctification. How many priests and religious, how many persons living in the world, realize that if they have been able to maintain themselves and even to make some progress in the love of God, they owe it to the encouragements, the exhortations, and the counsels of those silent friends called books! But it is with this, as with all the other means which God in His goodness places at our disposal: they are efficacious in proportion as we are able and willing to profit by them.

Dear reader, I have prayed much and have asked for

many prayers that this book may do good to your soul. I have prayed before beginning to write, and while I was at work upon it ; and I shall not cease to ask God to bless these pages and to make them useful to very many souls. But do you, on your side, put yourself in the dispositions which will make the reading profitable to you—dispositions of prayer and of love. Form a real, ardent desire to derive light for your guidance and a greater inclination towards virtue. Express this desire to Our Lord—at any rate, within your heart. This will be to make an act of love and humility to God, and by this act your mind will be made more susceptible, your will more docile ; and Our Lord will not then disdain to make use of this poor work to enlighten you and incline you to good.

To all those who are athirst for perfection, to all who love the Heart of Jesus and understand that devotion to the Sacred Heart consists, not in making use of certain forms of prayer, but in responding with a real love to His love, I offer this book in which I am about to set forth the rules of the love of God.

I hope that it may also prove of service to those devoted souls in France whom the Freemasons have deprived of the helps of the religious life. The devils are proud now of this triumph, but it will only endure for a while ; and our dear " secularized " Sisters may hasten the end of their time of trial by accepting all their privations gladly, and showing themselves, in spite of everything, only so much the more faithful to Our Lord. " To them that love God all things work together unto good " (Rom. viii. 28). God makes use of tribulations and persecutions for the perfecting of His true friends. If these pages could, even in part, supply the means of sanctification of which those souls have been deprived and help them to profit by their trials, my labours would be amply repaid. And you, dear Religious of the Good Shepherd, great is my happiness in

being able to offer this work to you also. Your sisters of the Mother-House have already had its first-fruits. They will recognize many of the truths which have been expounded to them. I am glad to be able thus to reach those amongst you who labour and spend yourselves in other Foundations of the Congregation, especially you whom the Divine Master commissioned me to establish in piety and the interior life during those all-important days of the novitiate. Mothers and Sisters of this highly deserving Congregation, it is a real pleasure to be able to speak publicly of my attachment to your most valuable work, and my esteem for your devotion and zeal. Never have I been as proud of my title of Director of the Mother-House of the Good Shepherd as since Hell has begun to wage war against you. It cannot forgive you for wresting so many souls from its grasp. You, more than any others, have the honour of being the target for the arrows of God's enemies. The infidel Press of all nations pour out their far-fetched calumnies upon you.[1] But you console yourselves with those words of Jesus which are so appropriate to you: "Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for My sake. Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in Heaven" (St. Matt. v. 11, 12).

I cannot conclude this preface without offering my very hearty thanks to those who have placed valuable manuscripts at my disposal. I have drawn from them copiously, and if this book is productive of good, the greater part of the merit will be due to these kind friends.

[1] Those of our readers who wish to know the falseness of all these wicked charges will find much information and the most convincing proofs in a pamphlet entitled *La Vérité sur le Bon Pasteur*, by M. Rivet, the eminent Lyons lawyer. (Lyons et Paris, Vitte.)

EDITOR'S PREFACE

MRS. F. YORKE SMITH has asked me to write a preface to her translation of this work of the Abbé Saudreau's. She has already helped me to introduce this learned and devout writer to English-speaking Catholics, by co-operating in the translation of his admirable work, *The Degrees of the Spiritual Life*. In this task she has proved herself a translator of no mean skill.

Of the book itself it is not necessary that I should speak. The Abbé Saudreau's reputation as a spiritual writer is deservedly high in France, where his writings have a very large circulation. They are also becoming known and admired in Germany, Italy, and other countries, through the medium of translations. Nothing but good can result from this. The doctrine of the learned author is founded on that of the saints and masters of the spiritual life, and his expositions of the truths of ascetical and mystic theology is not only sound and practical, but attractive and persuasive in a very high degree.

May God grant that to very many souls this work may be a guide in the way that leads to God!

DOM BEDE CAMM, O.S.B.

ERDINGTON ABBEY,
BIRMINGHAM.

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THE WAY THAT LEADS TO GOD

CHAPTER I

THE CREATION

Universa propter semetipsum operatus est Dominus (The Lord hath made all things for Himself).—PROV. xvi. 4.

§ 1. *God's Designs in the Work of Creation.*

1. WHEN God created the invisible and the visible worlds, it was not for His own greater happiness. He desired to communicate His gifts, to enrich His creatures with His treasures; but this overflowing of His goodness tended necessarily to His honour. He, as it were, projected a ray of His perfection, and all that proceeded forth from the Divine Hands published abroad His glory.

By His works, then, God is glorified, and this is only just. To Him, the infinitely great, infinitely beautiful, infinitely holy Being, an infinite glory is due. Not all creation combined could praise Him in accordance with His merits. *Major est omni laude.* He can create nothing, therefore, which does not owe Him the tribute of its homage.

Thus everything proceeds forth from God, but everything is made for Him and must return to Him again. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the first beginning and last end of all things.

2. Inanimate creatures unconsciously and involuntarily sing canticles in their Creator's praise. "The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of His hands" (Ps. xviii. 1). And at the spectacle

of all the marvels that He has wrought, the heart of man uplifts itself also towards Him.

And this, indeed, was God's object when He made Nature so beautiful : to illuminate man's mind and to delight the hearts of His children. Before man could love Him, God must needs make Himself known by man ; and because it is impossible to know God directly, to see Him as He is in Himself, He wonderfully revealed His invisible attributes, His grandeur and His perfections, in the works of His hands. *Invisibilia enim ipsius per ea quæ facta sunt intellecta conspiciuntur.* In Nature He has given us a Divine book which is most excellent for the instruction of the faithful. But, alas ! not every one is skilled to read therein. Those souls who are not enamoured of the love of God, and who never spare Him a thought, contemplate the work and forget the Workman. They see the reflection without thinking of the light from which it proceeds. And so Nature is an empty thing to the soul that is void of God. But the soul filled with God sees and knows Him everywhere ; the Divine perfume is universally perecptible : it perceives God's smile, it hears the words by which He is revealed. The Saints could read in this great book of Nature without any effort ; everything spoke to them of the Beloved.

Everything, in fact, speaks of God to the pure heart : *Beati mundo corde quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt* (Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God—St. Matt. v. 8). They shall indeed see Him in Heaven, and this will be the resplendent reward of their purity. But if they cannot behold Him face to face here below, they can catch glimpses of Him ; they can contemplate Him in His works. And the greater the purity, the clearer is the soul's vision. When the clouds of passion, the obscuring mists of sin, do not darken the sky, the Divine Sun shines forth, and its rays illumine and enkindle the soul.

Purify your souls, then, ye children of men ; not only of the stains of sin which disfigure them, but of im-

perfections also, those natural attachments which tarnish their beauty. And then gaze around you and above you, and the heavens and the earth will speak to you of God. The stars, shining overhead, will say : Behold us ; admire the torches which the Lord of the Universe has lighted for the guidance of your footsteps and the delight of your eyes. If our splendour is never diminished, if the light that we give forth leaves our radiance unimpaired, how inexhaustible must be the riches, how infinite the splendour, of Him who has created us, and who is the source of all light, all beauty, and all truth !

And then direct your eyes towards the humbler creatures round about you, and they too will sing their Creator's praise. Oh, how beautiful, how gracious must not He be who has lavished so much beauty and so much sweetness upon this inferior world of matter ! How high and benevolent He who has sown in such profusion, everywhere over the whole surface of the globe, such a diversity of plants, such fruitful trees, such sustaining fruits—He who has disposed His precious treasures, even in the bowels of the earth itself, who has peopled the earth and the air, the rivers and the seas, with such various forms of life ! Yes ! He is rich, He is powerful, He is good ; for He has created all those things for man, His privileged creature, to whom He has given dominion over this terrestrial globe : *Omnia subjecisti sub pedibus ejus, oves et boves universas, insuper et pecora campi* (Thou hast subjected all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, moreover the beasts also of the fields). " Thou hast put all things, Lord, under our feet, the beasts also of the field, the birds of the air, and the fishes of the sea that pass through the paths of the sea " (Ps. viii. 8, 9).

3. And yet the material world is but the image and the symbol of the spiritual, and that which the other creatures do unconsciously (since they proclaim God's glory unawares) man must perform of his free will, and with how much more reason ? And then, how beautiful is the

spectacle, viewed from the Heaven of the elect, of the souls that are faithful to God on earth! Each one has its special beauty, its form and colour, according to the virtues which it practises in the performance of the task committed to it. The sanctifying grace which penetrates and transfigures them endows them with a splendour which is invisible indeed to our carnal eyes, but wonderful in the sight of the Angels and of the Saints. And as that multitude of stars, the armies that are in Heaven (Rev. xix. 14), delight our eyes, so the multitude of just souls, scattered abroad here, but reunited there in one happy band and forming a wonderfully harmonious whole, an army drawn up in order of battle, delight the eyes of the elect.

4. And if the just upon earth are already transformed by grace here below, how much more brilliantly will they shine on that day when, their exile ended, their souls cleansed from every stain of sin, grace will have given place to glory. *Fulgebunt sicut stellæ in perpetuas æternitates* ("They shall shine as the brightness of the firmament," as the prophet Daniel says—Dan. xii. 3). Their effulgence, we are told by St. Paul, will not be all in the same measure (1 Cor. xvi. 41), and as one star differs from another in glory, so will it be with the Blessed.

How great will be, how great already is, the beauty of this heavenly army! Jesus, the Divine Sun, is the King thereof, and before Him every star's lustre pales and grows dim. Mary, to whom the Church applies the words of Holy Scripture, *Pulchra ut Luna* (Fair as the moon—Cant. vi. 9), is the star which outshines all the others, and is surpassed only by the brightness of her Divine Child. And from Him it is that she borrows her light, a light which she gives out again, less powerfully, it is true, but all untarnished; less dazzling, but without any shadow of spot. For no foreign body, no cloud or mist, has ever come to intercept the rays of the Divine Sun, and to hinder the mystic moon from receiving the full force of His beams.

Therefore the illumination is perfect, and the Divine Sun is reflected in her with a marvellous purity.

So, then, the stars of the firmament, the planets of the day and of the night, are made for God. The just upon earth and the elect in Heaven are made for Him. Mary, the Queen of Angels and of men ; Mary, that most faithful mirror of the Divine perfections—Mary is made for God, and proclaims His goodness, His holiness, and His power.

§ 2. *How Man ought to set about glorifying God.*

5. But what have we ourselves to do towards the accomplishment of the Divine intention—that is to say, of God's glory ? Before all else we have to fall in with this plan, and to know no other ambition than that of conforming ourselves thereto by doing God's will, always and in all things. Listen, Christian souls, to the language of the humble plant : " I exist for God ; He has made me for Himself. I delight the eye, I emit a sweet fragrance, because He has willed it so to be. If I am unseen of men, I am none the less happy on that account, for this also is His will." And when it has faded, does it not still speak the same language ? " I have attained my end. I have accomplished my Master's design. He is satisfied ; let me die, therefore, and disappear.

" Learn of me, ye children of men, to acquit yourselves well of the tasks assigned to you by the Sovereign Lord of all. Suffer yourselves, like me, to be cultivated, pruned, and trimmed. It is thus that you will become graceful shrubs, or bearers of brilliant blossoms ; or even, it may be, should God so will it, useful, although still humbler, plants. And in this way a perfect garden will be formed, where utility will be combined with beauty, and the Master will be justly proud of His possession and will take His delight therein."

Ah, beautiful as the world of souls already is, how much more lovely would it become if they would only yield

themselves with docility to the Almighty designs, and would begin by accepting the part which Providence assigns to them. "I would be a flower," this one says, "to delight the Master's eye." But what if the flower would be useless there; if the spot where He has placed you is adapted for some humble plant—less brilliant, certainly, but none the less useful? Should not His will be the rule for yours?

6. This self-evident principle, universally admitted in theory, is forgotten in practice more often than people think. It is forgotten first of all by those who covet posts or occupations which nature finds more congenial; seeking comfort, or honour, or exemption from certain troubles, rather than the pure will of God. They fly from the Cross, they dread contradictions or humiliations, and indulge in the vain hope that by changing their surroundings they will avoid their trials.

And do not those who remain where Providence has placed them endeavour also to escape from the Divine will? If amongst the various occupations in which they may engage they choose the pleasantest, if amongst the virtues which they might practise they select the easiest or the most conspicuous, they disturb the order which the Master has ordained, and expose themselves to His chastisements.

Let them consent, therefore, to be what God has chosen to make them; not preferring their own feeble designs to the decrees of the Infinite Wisdom. Let them also submit to be fashioned in accordance with the Divine plan, and not oppose a criminal resistance to the efforts of the gardener who has been charged with the task of cultivating them.

7. For God has indeed called in auxiliaries to the important work of the culture of souls. He it is who makes all things fruitful, who gives life and increase. But it is Paul who plants, Apollo who waters; it is God's minister who trims, prunes, and weeds the Divine Master's garden.

A tree growing by itself, without cultivation, ungrafted, unwatered, a tree that never feels the pruning-knife amongst its over-luxuriant boughs, that is never freed either from the parasitic plants that consume its sap, or from the proximity of weeds or other trees that crowd or stifle it, would continue to be a wild tree, and bear but scanty and ill-flavoured fruit. It needs, therefore, to be cut back and tended. If it was endowed with consciousness and feeling, it would not, it is true, see the gardener approach it, pruning-knife in hand, without apprehension. But if it was also gifted with intelligence and judgment, it would be glad to think that a painful but necessary operation would remove everything that was harmful to its capacity for bearing fruit, or would give it a beautiful shape and make it more pleasing to the master of the garden.

8. In the garden of the Church there are more trees than one might think that are reluctant to be pruned, and will not allow themselves to be fashioned as they should—who will not submit, or submit but imperfectly, to the necessary cultivation. And this is because it costs us something to control our actions, to admit the strength of our passions, the baseness of our desires, the number of our ugly faults. We are afraid of receiving certain advice which will perhaps upset our projected plans, necessitate fatiguing exertions, or call for incessant vigilance or some painful acts of self-denial. It is hard also to be thwarted in our tastes, to be perpetually urged to live in a state of oblivion and humility. What is it that we so often wish when we go to our spiritual fathers? To receive marks of esteem and approval, to be told that we are in the right in any disputes, to be pitied, to have those at whose hands we have suffered blamed. If we hear the voice of grace which calls for sacrifices, we seek reasons for being exempt. We want to be encouraged to listen to the promptings of nature in the hope of lulling the accusing whispers of conscience, and being able to rest in a blind security. What

ingenuity certain persons exercise in the accomplishment of this end, and often without being aware of it themselves. How skilfully they colour their desires, put a good complexion upon bad excuses, present facts in a false light! When we have recourse to direction with none but these human motives and these subtleties of spurious coinage, when we deceive ourselves before deceiving our directors, we make direction ineffectual, and abuse one of the greatest means of advancement which God has given to His children.

9. The humble and fervent soul, with no aim beyond that of progressing at all costs in the love of God, understands direction differently, and knows how to derive the most precious results from it.

Practising no self-deception with regard to its own faults, it makes them known to its director with a great simplicity and an entire frankness. It knows that the success of the direction depends as much upon itself as upon its guide, that it ought not to wait for him to take the initiative, but should ask for advice, pour out its secret maladies, its difficulties, the obstacles which lie in its path. It desires to be encouraged, not to rid itself of all that restrains or irks it, but to fight valiantly, and never to yield either to the frailty or the ill-founded complaints of its nature.

10. And the inmates of our gardens give us another valuable lesson. They teach us how we should comport ourselves during the storms which at times assail our souls. Amongst plants, some bow down before the blast; others remain immovable, proudly opposing their full stature to the storm. And these last cannot, if they are frail, resist the force of the wind. They are soon broken, and the earth is strewn with their fragments.

Those that bend, on the other hand, are not broken. They may perhaps have received some temporary damage from the storm; the sodden earth may have left some muddy traces of its contact upon their leaves. But the

storm once over-past, a few drops of the water with which the gardener will sprinkle them will cause the stains to disappear, and the plants will shine out with fresh beauty under the kindly rays of the sun.

When violent tempests come to assail it, the soul's first duty is to humble itself and send up its supplication to God. If, filled with self-confidence, it boasts of its strength, it runs great risks ; for it seeks support from the very quarter where none is to be found. It soon succumbs to its presumptuous assurance, and then gives way to depression, anger, and discouragement.

He who humbles himself, on the other hand, confessing with shame his own evil tendencies and his great weakness, and putting his whole trust in God, has recourse to prayer, and emerges victorious from the fray. Persons who are incessantly and unreasonably thwarted, and who are exposed to constantly recurring vexations, are greatly tempted to impatience and murmurings ; while those whose conflicts are more secret, and even more painful, are greatly distressed at the bad tendencies which they feel (and this sometimes with great violence) within them. The best, in fact the only means of not losing patience and of keeping from sin, is to humble ourselves at the very beginning of these revolts of nature, and cry for succour to Him who alone is able to fortify us against ourselves and our enemies. By this means the victory is assured. In times of great trial human frailty will doubtless commit some faults. None but perfect souls can endure these furious onslaughts without having any weakness to deplore. In the case of generous but not yet heroic souls there is a blending of success and defeat, but the victories are much more numerous than the failures. And then the acts of virtue that are achieved when resisting these violent impulses to evil, show a resolute and very meritorious will ; while the moments of weakness, being due merely to a slight slackening, a passing forgetfulness of the will, carry with them only a light responsibility, and are easily

pardoned. By a sincere and humble confession all these stains are effaced, and the soul emerges from the ordeal more glorious and more dear to God than before.

11. More dear to God! Yes, for it has glorified Him exceedingly. If every creature, the stars no less than the flowers and shrubs, celebrate God's glory, nothing honours Him and glorifies Him as perfectly as the faithful soul, the tried soul above all others.

Those occupying the most exalted positions in men's eyes are not those who shine the brightest before the eyes of the Angels and reflect the splendour of the Divinity with the greatest purity. Rather it is more often the souls that are universally ignored and despised who imitate the virtues of Jesus, and consequently the perfections of the Heavenly Father, with the greatest perfection. The life of Jesus was for the space of thirty years hidden and full of suffering : *In laboribus a juventute mea* (In labours from my youth—Ps. lxxxvii. 16). There have always been hidden souls within the Church whose lives are a perpetual sacrifice, and who seem to have come into this world for the sole purpose of reproducing the sorrows of their Divine Master. Opposition is their drink, and suffering their meat. One would sometimes say that all created things were in a conspiracy to persecute them, the most insignificant events work out to their detriment. It is Providence that contrives so many occasions of suffering for them ; but very few of their fellow-men understand their ways or sympathize with their ills. These hidden souls are the source of much glory to God.

12. There are other servants of God who glorify Him greatly, but who make more sensation and attract more attention. They receive much light from above, and it is their mission to re-impart it to their brethren. And in proportion as they succeed in eschewing the spirit of the world, turning their aspirations and desires towards the high regions of faith, God sends them ever more and more

light. The greater their freedom from the preoccupations of nature, and the more single-eyed their devotion to God's undivided interests, so much the more the Divine influence operates upon them.

But for them also life is thickly set with trials, and the mission which they have to accomplish is fruitful in crosses.

These, the unknown martyrs and zealous apostles, are they who render the greatest glory to God amongst men. They already constitute the royal escort, as it were, here below; the guard of honour to the Sovereign Master. And in Heaven they will also stand nearest to Him, and be the first in His Courts.

13. Other souls, again, have a special vocation, which it will not be amiss to describe here. In the Courts of earthly Sovereigns there are some who are styled the members of the Queen's Household. The persons who compose it—the officers, chamberlains, maids-of-honour, etc.—are no less in the service of the King; rather, they serve him in serving the Queen. But it is to her that they consecrate their time, to her that they devote their assiduous care. And there are souls whom God seems to have set aside in an especial manner for the service of His glorious Mother on earth. They seek God without doubt; they live only for Him; but they go to Him always by way of Mary. The thought of this dear Mother is incessantly present to their minds; all that they do is by her and with her. The Holy Spirit who inspires them directs their thoughts constantly upon the goodness and kindness of this Blessed Mother. The way of these souls is very simple, but it is full of peace and very sure. They usually have fewer dangers to surmount, fewer ills to endure, than the other souls of which we have just been speaking.

Mary seems to have removed from their path the stones which might injure them, and she leads them by the hand, as it were, on the road to Heaven, of the delights of which she gives them many a foretaste by the way.

CHAPTER II

MAN IN GOD'S IMAGE

Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram (Let us make man to our image and likeness).—GEN. i. 26.

14. ALL created things should glorify God, but none upon earth can so honour Him as man can do. Is not he the King of creation? Is it not for him that God has called this marvellous world out of nothingness? He made it ready long before the day when He introduced man upon the earth; and it was at the completion of all His preparations, when He, in His infallible judgment, had found everything very good and fitted to His purpose—*Et vidit Deus quod esset bonum* (And God said that it was good)—that our first father received the gift of being and life. Nothing was to be lacking to his happiness; all creatures were made subject to him, and God dowered him with some portion of His own authority with regard to them. It was His will that no part of the animal creation, being devoid of reason, should be able to evade the authority of their new master. The animals, the plants, were all given to him for his use. And in order that he might be able to appropriate all these riches, God provided him with a nature which was wonderfully organized: senses to understand the inferior creatures, and to profit by them; limbs with which to move about, and to grasp such things as he desired. All things, therefore, belong to him, and each one of the creatures round about him is a gift which he has received at the hands of God Himself.

And in order that he should be the more conscious of

the abundance of these benefits, and not enjoy them and then immediately forget them, God has given him a memory, by means of which the recollection of them is preserved, and he is able to reflect upon their profusion and their number.

But, above all, God has endowed man with the gift of intelligence, without which all these benefits would fail to be understood, and would not accomplish the end for which they were created. For if all things speak of God—if they show forth His power, His riches, His wisdom, His goodness and His love—it is in a mysterious language which they do not themselves understand. God cares for the lilies of the fields, and the little sparrows, but neither the lily nor the bird knows that its life has been given and is preserved by a superior Being. Nature in all its loveliness and luxuriance reveals nothing to the eagle, whose piercing vision, as it soars aloft, ranges over so many of its beauties in one glance. To one who cannot read, a book is a mystery.

And thus, in order to crown His work, God placed amidst the unreasoning creatures an intelligent being, who should be capable of paying a tribute of glory to the author of so many marvels, and a tribute of gratitude to the Supreme Benefactor who has loaded him with His gifts.

15. But not by his intelligence and his praise of the Divine greatness only does man glorify God. He is himself the most striking proof of the wisdom, the power, and the goodness of the Most High. He is the masterpiece of the Divine Artist, and is stamped with the most perfect likeness of His perfections; for was not he made in God's image? God is the sovereign, intelligent Being. God the Father knows Himself. He contemplates Himself, and by this infinite knowledge the Word is brought forth—equal to the Father, of whom He is the perfect mirror, and reproducing His infinite splendour without shadow or spot.

And man brings forth *his* word also. When he makes an act of intelligence, he represents to himself, in a true

conception, the object of his knowledge; he incarnates his idea in a word, *verbum*, which he pronounces interiorly, even when he remains silent before his fellows. This production of the human word is doubtless a coarse and imperfect imitation of the Divine filiation; it has its result not in a person like to and equal with the thinker (as is the case with the Blessed Trinity), but in a pure accident, a mere mood of the intellect. Human thought, therefore, bears but a faint resemblance to the Divine Word, but there is nothing, nevertheless, in the material world which approaches so closely to this generation of the Word—nothing in all Nature so beautiful as a single act of the intellect.

May it not also be said that the higher and purer the thoughts that we form within our minds, the less imperfect becomes God's image within us? This is especially so when we make acts of faith; when, under the influence of grace, and by the aid of supernatural light, we commune within our own hearts upon the greatness of the Deity. God is then working in us and with us, and this supernatural operation more nearly resembles the generation of the Word in the bosom of the Blessed Trinity. This act of faith shines with a marvellous beauty, a beauty which is in a sense Divine, and surpassing all the splendours of the purely natural order. And in God there is love in addition to knowledge. The Father and the Son love one another with a perfect and infinite love, and the result, the fruit of this love, is the Holy Spirit, the eternal, uncreated, living bond, uniting the Father and the Son. Now, if the act of the intellect produced in the human soul represents the conception of the Word, so the act of the will, or of love, is the far-off and imperfect, but also the true, image of the procession of the Holy Ghost. And may we not also say here that when the will produces a supernatural act of charity, with the assistance and under the impulse of grace, there is then formed within our souls a less rude likeness to the procession of the Holy Ghost?

So that the union of these two supernatural operations, that of the intellect which believes and of the will which loves, produces within us a true likeness to the most Blessed Trinity. It transfigures the soul, and turns it to the honour and glory of Him to whom its beauty is due, and who has given it the power to perform such sublime acts. So one faithful soul alone can glorify God more than can all the lower creation combined. And the holier the soul, so much the greater is the glory to God of which it is the cause.

16. We are free to produce these supernatural acts which give a celestial beauty to our souls. The glory that we render to God depends, then, upon our free co-operation. The plant gives honour to Him who has created it ; its form, its qualities, its life, its growth, its blossoming, its reproduction, show forth the Divine power. But it has no consciousness of all this ; it is not free to augment its distinguishing traits, or to diminish its beauty and splendour.

Man, on the other hand, can lend himself either more or less to the Divine designs. He can offer God a magnificent homage, or give Him scanty glory. The plant glorifies God of necessity ; man glorifies Him by free acts, and most of all by acts which are nothing less than victories.

Yes, victories ! For man has been made for conquest, because by victory he does honour to himself at the same time that he honours God.

It was victory that God desired for our first parents when He put them to the proof in the earthly paradise. If they had overcome the tempter, vast would have been the consequences of their triumph. It was by victory that the faithful Angels had already, before that day, assured their own eternal happiness.

Since the commission of the first sin the difficulty has increased. Not only have we to conquer our enemies, but we must vanquish our own selves also. Man's inward and outward powers had alike contributed to his sin, and

his whole nature was thus thrown into confusion. Everywhere within him there now reigns a revolt against the good, an inclination for the evil. He must repress this rebellion, overmaster this tendency. He must overcome his nature, and bear down all its resistance.

There is nothing finer than this victory, while on the other hand there is nothing more shameful than to be beaten in the fight. Well may they blush who are unable to subdue their own selves! They often strive to palliate their defeats; they do not admit that they have failed. They even try to make out that they have not been overcome, and the witness which they thus render to the beauty of victory is a striking one. The pagan nations sacrificed everything for the sake of being victorious over their enemies, but they also understood that to be victorious over self was a still finer achievement. Truly nothing is finer than self-conquest. The Holy Spirit has proclaimed this: "He that ruleth his spirit (is better) than he that taketh cities" (Prov. xv. 32).

17. The faithful man, therefore, glorifies God better than all other creatures, both because he is incomparably more beautiful and because his works are incomparably more glorious.

He is more beautiful because God, by His graces, communicates to him a magnificence, a splendour, which is nothing else than a participation of the Divine splendour, a reflection, an image of the Blessed Trinity.

The works which he performs are glorious because they are at the same time victories and supernatural works; for they are done in concert with God, and God's part in them is greater than man's. It is God who first takes action. He inspires the thought and the desire for good. He operates upon the human faculties in order to impel them to the performance of supernatural acts.

From the Divine Sun there shines forth, as it were, three rays, which enter into the soul. The first unites itself with the memory, calling up within our minds the

recollection of a good deed to be accomplished, of a virtue to be practised. The second unites itself with the intellect, and our motives become supernaturally illumined. The third unites itself with the will, and, while enkindling it, urges it on and imparts to it a Divine strength. From this triple influence a unique, a supernatural, act results, which glorifies God both because it proceeds from Him and owes its intrinsic beauty to Him, and also because the man himself, on his side, can do nothing except in the power of the grace which he has received from God, and wills to do nothing that is not for His glory.

And how great is the supernatural act that is thus accomplished by the faithful soul even when it passes unperceived in the eyes of the creature! It is of Divine origin; it is Divine by participation; and therefore the fruits that it bears are immortal, even as God Himself is immortal. And what are the fruits of these supernatural acts, and even of one single such act?

They are: (1) The increase of grace, the beautifying of the soul; (2) merit, that is transformed in Heaven into an increase of eternal glory and felicity for the man who has acted supernaturally; and consequently (3) an increase of the outward glory of God which shall endure for all eternity.

CHAPTER III

THE QUALITIES OF THE SOLDIER OF GOD

Labora sicut bonus miles Christi (Labour as a good soldier of Jesus Christ).—2 Tim. ii. 3.

18. It is only through conflict that man can glorify God. If he must gain by the sweat of his brow the food which is to sustain the body, he must also win by his valour those graces which are to strengthen and beautify his soul. But what is to be the manner of his combat? What qualities must he exhibit in this incessant warfare, which will terminate only with his life? The soldier of God must be *obedient*, he must be *patient*, he must be *humble*, he must be *ever master of himself*.

§ 1. *Obedience.*

19. The fundamental quality in a soldier is the spirit of discipline; the first thing required of him is that he should obey—that he should advance when the order is given, or remain where he is at the risk of his life when his superior officer has given the command. An army in which each soldier should follow his own ideas and act as he pleases would be an army doomed to certain defeat. How much more should the soldier of God, who can only be victorious by God's assistance, fight as He wills him to do! He must go, not where he likes, but where God wishes him to be; he must act, not according to his own tastes or caprices, but in accordance with God's designs. He must use the means which Providence provides for

him, or which the Holy Spirit inspires, and not pay any attention to his own preference. He must renounce his own opinions, and defer to the advice and the orders of those who are commissioned to enlighten and lead him.

St. Francis of Assisi, responsive to the light which he had received, had founded his Order on the basis of poverty and humility. This great Saint was conspicuous for a touching simplicity. Nothing which savoured of *pose*, conventionality, or ostentation, had any meaning for him. Amongst his first disciples, one of the most remarkable for intelligence, energy, and even fervour, was Brother Elias; but his spirit was in no wise the spirit of St. Francis. For the intentions of the holy Founder of the Order, so wholly in conformity with the Gospel teachings, Elias wished to substitute his own personal ideas. He doubtless thought his Father's naïve simplicity unworthy of an Order dedicated to the work of Apostleship, and considered it calculated to inspire contempt in the minds of the faithful. More dignity, more splendour, seemed to him to be required. It was not the Spirit of God which inspired him and impelled him along this path, but rather the spirit of the world. And the end of this celebrated friar clearly shows that the greatest qualities of mind and heart are useless, and only serve to bring out man's helplessness, unless they are accompanied by a perfect submission to grace.

Think of all the wasted efforts, the fruitless struggles of those who act in their own wisdom and after their own will, instead of applying themselves to know and follow the Divine Will. The Israelites—one sees it right through their history—were invariably defeated when they marched to battle without receiving God's commands. Victory was always assured to them, on the other hand, when they had been careful to consult the Divine oracles, and to conform themselves thereto. God never forsakes those who fight for Him alone and desire only the accomplishment of His holy Will. He will give them the victory over all their enemies.

§ 2. *Patience.*

20. War is indeed a rude school for patience. How many fatigues must be endured—fatigues more painful and enervating, even, than the dangers which have to be encountered! A good soldier is one who shows endurance. Nothing checks him, nothing daunts him; neither marches nor counter-marches, night-watches, privations, inclemencies of weather; he is one who never complains of being ill-fed, badly housed, of his bed or clothing, who bears all his sufferings cheerfully, happy, even at such a price, in being able to take part in his country's defence and in her victories.

And the strife in which Christ's soldier must engage is fruitful in painful struggles, and the Christian who aims at victory must be armed with a patience which is proof against everything. These sufferings come to him from God, who thus proves His faithful servants, withdrawing Himself from them, and making as though He had forsaken them; or else they come from his fellow-men, who are the instruments which God makes use of for the purification and sanctification of His own children, so that they who murmur against their brothers are actually, though they do not know it, murmuring against God. And finally the devils, eager for his damnation, leave him no peace.

Now, suffering is as necessary for the development of virtue as water is indispensable to the life of a plant. The virtue which is not tried flags like a plant in a dry soil; it may even wither and die. Suffering is a good gift from God, because it provides occasions of merit; it helps to repress the exuberances of nature, to lessen its ardours, to moderate its tendencies, to keep it under the yoke of reason and faith. Great is the wisdom acquired by those who know how to suffer aright.

And suffering strengthens virtue. A soul beginning to give itself up to piety is a fair sight. Like a tender plant,

pushing up its fragile stem above the earth, its colour is lovely and delicate. But if it is pleasing to the eye on account of its freshness, it is also sensitive and frail. A blast of wind can wither it, the sun can fade it. But when it shall have withstood tempests, heat, and inclemencies of weather, it will be stronger and less exposed to danger. So the soldier of Christ who has suffered aridities, temptations and tribulations of every kind, has acquired strength, provided always that he has borne all these things with patience and love. Thus only will he be invincible and his enemies will be powerless against him.

§ 3. *Humility.*

21. When an earthly general is preparing to lead his forces into battle, he represents the victory to them as assured, and, by way of augmenting their confidence, he overwhelms them with praise, he holds them up as the best troops in the world. God's soldiers are likewise called upon to conquer ; they must fight hopefully, with the certainty of victory ; but, far from putting their confidence in themselves (as do the soldiers of our earthly armies), it is by way of humility only that they must fight, and that they can bear away the palm. When Gedeon gathered together his army for the repulse of the Madianites, God found it too large. He reduced it twice, until it had reached what seemed a ridiculously small number. Three hundred fighting men sufficient to crush the immense host of the enemy ? Yes, God said, "lest Israel should glory against Me, and say: I was delivered by mine own strength" (Judg. vii. 2).

It is by very small and very humble means that God constantly accomplishes great wonders on behalf of His people. So Our Lord often brings His elect to perfection, less by deeds of great splendour than by secret ways and works which are in no wise remarkable in the eyes of the world—works performed with a great purity of intention

and a love full of ardour and delicacy. Fine actions might incline the heart to pride; they are successful only in the case of souls far gone in humility. Abraham did not begin with the sacrifice of Isaac. When God put him to the proof he was already of consummate virtue, and he had acquired this perfect virtue by fidelity to the daily duties of his state, by a constant piety, which led him to erect an altar, wherever he went, by works, small indeed, but very precious in God's sight.

This great patriarch was humble of heart, as is proved by his conduct towards Lot, his nephew, to whom he so readily ceded the better part. He was good and affectionate, as all his history shows, and it was by the practice of these virtues that he attained, little by little, to heroism. This same simplicity, this humility, this fidelity to the ordinary duties of their daily lives, is to be seen in the other holy patriarchs, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, and by this means they also became true servants of God and His chosen friends.

Nor must it be thought that these humble virtues demand little exertion. The efforts may not be very noticeable, but they require to be generous and constant. They are unseen of men, but they are appreciated by God; and he who constantly practises these small virtues is a valiant fighter and a victor full of merit.

And he is indeed meritorious who, in the ceaseless war which all men should wage here below, does not aspire after striking achievements, posts of honour, or a high renown, but who performs his task with simplicity, regardless of the opinions of men, and devoting himself quietly to the fulfilment of his duty. And yet this disposition of soul will not suffice to make a humble soldier of Christ. In order to have a right to this title, not merely must we abstain from seeking external glory, but we must not even desire to be glorious in our own eyes. We must accept our sinfulness and cheerfully admit to ourselves that we are imperfect, full of faults, and deserving of pity.

The spectacle of our faults is a sorrow to us; it was, in fact, the first chastisement of the first sin, the cause of that all-too-well-grounded shame which led Adam and Eve to hide themselves after the Fall. This sorrow is a just penalty, and it is our duty to submit to it. We should grieve, then, for our faults, but without allowing ourselves to be cast down by them, and without ever feeling anger against ourselves. The humility which engenders depression and discouragement is false and misleading; it proceeds not from God, but from the Devil. A tree is known by its fruits. When a disposition of the soul leads us to suspend, even momentarily, the work of our salvation, when it checks our upward flight, when it paralyses our forces, it is suggested by the enemy. The Evil One wishes to trouble the soul, or is discouraging it in the hope of destroying it. It is self-love which he is exciting under the cloak of humility, the self-love of a soul that relied upon itself, and is afflicted because of its own weakness, and which blushes to find itself so vile and so contemptible. There is a touch of angry pride in all discouragement.

God inspires quite another kind of humility. He not only instils it into the mind, thus enlightening the soul as to its sinfulness, but He touches the heart also, making it ready to humble itself cheerfully and to confess its own littleness and wickedness. Nothing then stands in the way of the second grace which always accompanies true humility—the grace of trust and peace. "I can do nothing of myself," says the humble soldier of Jesus Christ when he has made fresh proof of his own frailty. "I am nothing (*tametsi nihil sum*), but I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me" (*omnia possum in eo qui me confortat*—Phil. iv. 13). And then he rises up with fresh courage, and hastens forward to avenge his defeat by new victories.

§ 4. *Peace of Soul and Self-Mastery.*

22. A good soldier must always be master of himself. He must be equally capable of acting with impetuosity and ardour and of moderating his eagerness. He must never be foolishly carried away by his enthusiasm, or yield to a cowardly discouragement. He must always have himself well in hand, and this is the condition in which true courage becomes invincible. As soldiers of God, we too must be always masters of ourselves, and preserve that peace which our risen Lord wished to His disciples. In peace we shall find God, in peace we shall receive strength from Him. If this peace is absent from our hearts when we are in the midst of the strife, then the ardour for the fight proceeds more from our own passions than from grace ; it is nature which is acting within us, we are being urged on by human motives. Nature's way, in fact, is to torment and to disturb. God is never disquieted. His habitation is peace, He is peace itself—He the immutable, immobile Being, the communicator of all motion. And His action is powerful but gentle. The soul which yields itself to God's workings within it, the soul which does not intrude its own human haste, mingling it rashly with the impulses of grace, cannot fail to feel within it the signs of the Divine operation, and it continues calm, no matter what may befall it. But if, on the other hand, it yields to the promptings of Nature, the character of its action is quite different ; and what then is the value of its work, what the result of all its endeavours ?

He who abides in peace receives the pure illumination of God ; but he who falls into anxiety and anguish of mind, or is determined, at all costs, to gratify his inclinations, to see the accomplishment of his own will, is opposing obstacles to this Divine illumination: The clouded spirit, covered as with a thick mist by the anxieties which it accepts or, at any rate, does not set itself resolutely to throw off, by the natural desires which hold the attention

captive, and by the dread of witnessing the failure of its schemes, can no longer receive the rays of the Divine Sun. It thinks only of its fears; it is immersed in preoccupations; and how can the holy inspirations find their way in? It will then run grave risks of mistaking its road. Sometimes, for instance, it will not see its duty clearly; it will exaggerate the difficulties and fail to perceive the things which would encourage it, and many defects will follow. Only he who dwells in peace will be a valiant soldier; the Divine illumination will reveal to him many dangers which will have to be encountered, many sacrifices to be made, but it will also show him that all things are possible with God's assistance, and he will go forward without hesitation.

Before entering into the Promised Land the Israelites sent twelve of their number on ahead to explore. Those who were under the influence of their own passions did not see the land as it really was. Giving way to their fears and their cowardice, they believed that it would be mere rashness and folly to attempt to take possession of it. Two of the twelve only, calmer, more masters of themselves, because they, doubtless, had more peace in their souls, judged more sanely of the situation and did not lose heart. To possess God, to enjoy Him, to be united to Him even here below—this is the Land of Promise for the Christian soul. And, alas! how few view it with the necessary dispositions and judge of it wisely! The greater number, like the envoys of Moses, regard the conquest as impossible, the obstacles which have to be surmounted terrify them, their own weakness disheartens them. Only those who do not give way to their fears, but remain calm and steadfast, those only who have peace of soul, put their whole confidence in God, and set out resolutely for the conquest.

And let no one imagine, as too often happens, that the soul's peace is a singular gift which God deals out sparingly and grants only to the privileged few. Peace, it is often thought, cannot coexist with strife: "*I* cannot possess it

in the special circumstances in which God has placed me." "*I* have too many cares and worries," or, "*I* cannot know peace with a character like mine—*I* am naturally apprehensive and inclined to depression." "*I* am too anxious to do right, and to see others do the same. How *can* I be at peace when I commit so many faults or see others acting so wrongly?" Vain excuses, by which we deceive ourselves and so neglect to pursue the conquest of this inexpressibly great blessing! Those who understand the all-importance of this peace do not fall into this error. They very justly say to themselves that an infinitely good God will not refuse to souls of good-will this peace which is so essential to them. Those who do not know its value and do not exert themselves to the utmost to acquire it, show that they are still unenlightened, and are not acquainted with the way that leads to God.

When a soul has once tasted this peace, with what care should it not strive to preserve it! How it should keep watch lest its serenity should be disturbed! And whether it is victorious or suffers defeat let it still hold fast to its treasure; let the tide of peace engulf, as it were, its losses and its successes, its sins and its virtues alike. When it turns its thoughts to its enemies, when it endeavours to render an account of their attacks and their methods of action, searching out at the same time its own weak points, it must make this examination, while retrenching itself in peace as in some impregnable fortress. It should inhale and exhale peace, and every action should bear its mark and impress.

CHAPTER IV

THE BENEFITS OF THE CONFLICT

Non coronatur nisi qui legitime certaverit (He . . . is not crowned except he strive lawfully).—2 Tim. ii. 5.

23. We have enumerated the qualities which should distinguish the true soldier of God. Thus equipped, he may set forth to fight in the full undesrtanding that the strife will last during the whole of his earthly sojourn.

Throughout his entire life he will possess a rebellious nature and evil tendencies, which he will have to repress without ever being able to rid himself of them completely. Concupiscence is the result of original sin ; like the other ills which spring from the same source—namely, ignorance, sickness, and death—this concupiscence will make itself felt during our whole lives, in order that we may come to understand the heinousness of sin, and have the opportunity of expiating our personal offences.

But this strife is something more than a correction and a means of expiation. God chastises like a father ; the pains which He inflicts are at the same time blessings, because they hinder worse evils and are productive of inappreciable good. The conflict is a preventive against sloth, against a spiritual torpor which might degenerate into the sleep of death ; and it is also an occasion of merit, a means of augmenting our eternal felicity.

Woe, therefore, to those cowardly souls who refuse the combat. We saw just now how the Israelites, when making ready to invade the land of Chanaan which God had promised to them, sent spies on ahead to satisfy them as to its

productiveness. The fruits which they brought back with them were magnificent. It was with reason, they said, that the district had been described as a land flowing with milk and honey. But this land was inhabited by a valorous race and defended by many strong cities ; the conquest of this rich and beautiful country would necessitate a long and formidable war. We have seen how the majority of the spies exaggerated the difficulties of the situation and tried to dissuade the children of Israel from their projected enterprise. And the people, alas ! listened to them ; they murmured against God, and wished to escape from the conflict and to return to Egypt. And the Lord was angry. He had promised them victory, and they doubted His word. He willed that they should obtain the land by warfare, and, like cowards, they tried to escape the necessity of combat, and by so doing they showed themselves unworthy of the promised blessing.

The punishment which God inflicted was exemplary ; it was to serve as a warning for all the generations to come. Listen to the stern sentence : " In the wilderness shall your carcasses lie. All you that were numbered from twenty years old and upward, and have murmured against Me, shall not enter into the land, over which I lifted up My hand to make you dwell therein, except Caleb the son of Jephone, and Josue the son of Nun. Your children shall wander in the desert forty years, . . . until the carcasses of their fathers be consumed in the desert. According to the number of the forty days wherein you viewed the land, a year shall be counted for a day. And forty years you shall receive your iniquities and shall know My revenge " (Num. xiv. 29-34).

Thus are cowardly souls displeasing to God. Those, on the other hand, that are brave and ardent in the fight, rejoice His heart and are pleasing in His eyes. It was for this reason that, even after the conquest of the Promised Land, God chose that a remnant of the Chanaanites should be left alive ; He willed that the sons of the conquerors

should learn to war against the enemy, even as their fathers had done, and that His people should not lose the habit of warfare; so fatal is a life of peaceful ease to the soul, and so beneficial the presence of enemies which need to be repelled and conquered.

24. And more than any others must those souls sustain the severest conflicts whom God has called to a higher state of virtue, and to whom He has granted greater graces. Those pious persons are greatly mistaken, therefore, when they fail to realize that the life of a soul wholly given up to God's service must be one of ceaseless strife. They wish to serve God faithfully, to love Him with their whole hearts; but they hope to accomplish this without having to make too many demands upon their indolent natures. "I will be scrupulously exact, pious, devoted to my duty. I shall have a few battles to fight, but I certainly hope that there will be a great many intervals of repose, that, during my conflicts, I shall be upheld, encouraged, carried along, if need be. The promptings of my naturally affectionate heart will make me generous; the sweetness of prayer, the joys of communion, the paternal counsels of my director, will console me for my troubles, and I shall go through life upheld, protected, until the day of my final triumph."

What an illusion! The final triumph is not so cheaply won by those souls for whom God has reserved a high reward. Eternal happiness is a blessing which must be laboriously acquired. It is this which makes the glory of the elect and augments their happiness. It is obvious that those whose eternal bliss is to be enjoyed in the fullest measure must labour more abundantly than others here below. There will be long periods, sometimes, of continual conflict, fearful temptations, aridity, powerlessness. And at such times all exterior consolations often fail us—God alone remains; and He hides Himself in the soul's fastnesses without making His presence known. It is necessary to be prepared for these ordeals, to understand all their terrors in advance, and to accept them courageously. Then, when

the trial comes, when consolations have ceased, when all our feelings seem dried up, we must rest only upon faith, upon hope, and upon charity. On faith—believing in spite of everything in the power, the wisdom, and the love of God ; on hope—yielding ourselves into His hands with entire confidence in His infinite goodness ; on charity—multiplying acts of absolute conformity to the Divine Will, and taking comfort in the thought that, thanks to these trials, we shall know the Divine greatness better in Heaven, and shall love God the more.

When the hour of conflict comes, those who have prepared themselves for the fight show a far greater constancy than those who were counting upon the consolations of piety and were not expecting this state of desolation ; these latter are much more apt to lose courage. How many, then, relax their efforts, or lose patience under their difficulties, are angry with themselves and their own weakness, abandon the struggle, and fall into a deplorable condition ; or else, again, more frequently, they only half resist, and so lose those immense benefits which generous souls derive from their tribulations.

25. And immense truly are the results of these conflicts for valiant souls. Each victory is a conquest, and with the triumph over each separate fault they extend their empire over themselves, and having become more powerful they are also more capable of good.

Rome herself made a modest beginning. Under her Kings she was nothing but a village ; but her struggles with her nearer neighbours always resulted in conquest, and so her power grew perpetually. She had gradually become the mistress of the whole of Italy when the successful termination of the wars with Carthage extended her dominion as far as Spain and Africa. Fresh conflicts then enabled her to include within her frontiers, Gaul, a large part of Europe, Northern Africa, and Western Asia. Each fresh war enlarged the boundaries of her possessions, heightened her power, and made her more formidable to her enemies. And

so it has been with all great nations : it is only by numberless battles and dearly won victories that they have succeeded in extending their empire, enhancing their power, becoming capable of exercising a high measure of influence, being able to engage in great enterprises and to bring them to a successful conclusion. Other nations, on the contrary, more pacific or less favoured by circumstances, are kept within narrower limits, and have to be content to play a much more modest part in history. Thus the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg, the Principality of Monaco, and the Republic of San Marino, are incapable of influencing the course of human affairs.

Those who engage in trade do not all bring the same spirit of initiative to bear or exhibit the same activity, neither do they all resort to identical methods in order to extend their business. Some, who incline to a peaceful life, simply continue to maintain their establishment as it was when it came to them from their ancestors, and make no effort to enlarge their connection. Their profits are sufficient for their needs, although not allowing of their launching out into great enterprises. Others, more hard-working and ambitious, take an enormous amount of trouble and endure great fatigue. Each new undertaking, which they embark in so courageously, follow up so perseveringly, and bring to a successful conclusion, augments their capital and puts them in a position to carry out new and still more important enterprises and to obtain yet greater profits.

And it is the same in the spiritual life. Feeble souls, those who are timid, or who have few temptations, lead a comparatively tranquil existence. Their conflicts are not severe, and as they exhibit neither great valour nor much energy, they continue at the same level of virtue, and their trials make them no more capable of increasing their spiritual treasures than they were before. There are many souls who remain all their lives in a state which shows hardly any advance upon their original condition ; not

that their merits do not go on accumulating and that they do not get a little richer by the repetition of certain acts of virtue. But if their gains are accumulating, they are not increasing. They gain to-day what they gained ten, twenty, or thirty years ago. They are like lazy workmen, whose day's work, even after long practice, brings in no more than when they first came out of their apprenticeship. Those Christians who are poor fighters always exhibit many deficiencies. Their virtues have not developed, their behaviour reveals a mass of imperfections which they have ceased combating, and of which, indeed, they are no longer aware. Their dispositions of self-denial, humility, and love remain mediocre, and their most apparently brilliant achievements have but a slight value in God's eyes.

Very different are the results obtained by those generous hearts who, going on from conquest to conquest, have at the end of a few years first doubled, then quadrupled, and finally multiplied their strength fiftyfold or even a hundredfold.

The practice of every virtue has become familiar to them, and they produce these acts much more frequently and perfectly than in their youth, however fervent it may have been. They have not been satisfied merely to repulse the enemy feebly, and just to hold their own ground ; they attacked him vigorously and perseveringly ; they said, like David : *Persequar inimicos meos et comprehendam eos, nec dimittam donec deficiant* (I will pursue after my enemies and overtake them : and I will not turn again till they are consumed—Ps. xvii. 38).

Is it a question of dissipation ? They devoted themselves so wholeheartedly to keeping a watch over their senses, to checking the flights of the imagination, avoiding idle dreaming, cutting short useless trains of thought, that after years of conflict they have become the masters of their interior lives ; they regulate the soul's faculties almost at will. Thenceforth they never lose the sense of

God's presence, and by their entirely spontaneous and frequent acts of love they continue to dwell in a state of close union with Him.

If they have formerly suffered from ebullitions of self-love, they did not think it sufficient merely to disown these imperfections ; they aspired to a perfect humility, and in order that they might obtain this blessing from God, they sought to prove their good-will by multiplying those very acts which cost them most dear. They admitted their weaknesses to themselves, and were not ashamed to make them known. They voluntarily courted abasement, and thanked God sincerely for those humiliations which befell them unsought. And then there came a moment when humiliation was no longer painful and humility was practised naturally and without any restrictions.

If they have striven with a like ardour and constancy against the natural heat of their tempers, their sensuality, and their love of ease, and have courageously practised the opposite qualities, these virtues have finally become easy to them, and henceforth they do not practise them, like beginners, by halves, or merely by the aid of sensible graces and under the impulses of an enthusiastic imagination ; but they display a matured, a tranquil and firm decision, wherein the will operates with much more strength, and consequently much greater merit than before. And these habits, which are acquired by reiterated acts, while they do not put an end to the conflict, yet make the practice of the virtue much easier. They in no way diminish merit, because these habits, the result of long effort, are willed, and he who possesses them, happy in their acquisition, deliberately desires all their consequences. The will is more than ever attached to that good which it has pursued for so long ; there is no more need for energetic reactions in order to bring itself to perform the act of virtue, but its decisions are only the more absolute and intense.

26. But, above all, grace operates with a greater ease in the Christian heart which is fully master of itself.

Formerly the victory was wont to cost him very dear; violent efforts, which caused great disturbance, were necessary. Those vehement emotions, which some persons consider indispensable for the acquisition of great merit, are, on the contrary, nothing but an unfortunate consequence of the impurity of our nature, and are an obstacle to the perfection of our actions. The passions, being still strong, come into conflict with the grace which is leading us on towards the good, and this grace, if not actually overborne, is at least hindered and hampered in its salutary work. When, however, grace triumphs and passion is vanquished, the soul is content; it is even proud of having restrained itself, of having suffered much in the performance of duty; it is then tempted to self-complacency, and is disposed to reckon its merits according to the heat of the contest. This, however, is an error; for in these violent early conflicts Nature often intrudes her own activity into the operations of grace. In order to reject evil, to accomplish a difficult duty, to make a costly sacrifice, the soul has recourse, not to supernatural motives only (for their influence over it is not yet sufficient), but to human or less exalted motives, such as shame at itself and its own wickedness, desire for the esteem of others, or love of its own integrity, so deeply desirous is Nature of self-approval. Under the influence of these considerations she pits herself, as it were, against herself, and the victory is not due to the pure influence of grace.

But as the soul progresses, these revolts of Nature become less violent, although they never wholly cease, and grace, encountering fewer obstacles, operates more powerfully. The victory is much easier, and yet the acts of virtue are purer and more excellent than before. The sensible faculties are now seldom active, the imagination is quieter, the irascible appetite is at rest, the mind is not so busy, and God operates more freely.

It is God who then operates in the soul, and the soul lives in Him, by Him, and through Him. Its least acts

are now of much greater worth. A short prayer, some simple action on the part of a holy soul, is of higher value in God's eyes than all the strenuous efforts of a beginner. The Blessed Virgin went through no conflicts, and yet how perfect, how meritorious, how marvellously supernatural were the very least of her actions! We, indeed, are forced to struggle; but it is by dint of conquest that we approach to this tranquillity, to this self-mastery, to this strength, which give our human actions their full worth. Virtuous acts accomplished by beginners have, doubtless, their merit, and their eternal treasure will go on increasing; but these are the small coins which they add to day by day. Later on, after long contests valiantly sustained, the pieces of money are no longer the same. It is now gold which is laid to gold, bank-notes to bank-notes. Oh, how rich will be those generous souls, at that great day of reckoning, when it shall be meted out to each one of us according to his works!

CHAPTER V

THE OBJECT OF THE STRUGGLE AND THE MORTIFICATION OF THE SENSES

Video aliam legem in membris meis, repugnantem legi mentis meæ (I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind).—Rom. vii. 23.

§ 1. *The Sensible Appetites.*

27. The enemies whom we have to fight are not far away. They are within us, and the first, and not the least formidable amongst them, are the sensible appetites. We call by this name all those spontaneous attractions which draw us towards the objects which are congenial to our nature as soon as they are perceived by the senses ; and also those sudden indeliberate movements by which we rid ourselves, eagerly, or even violently, if need be, of the obstacles which stand in the way of our possession of these desired objects. The first of these appetites is styled the concupiscible appetite, and the second the irascible appetite.

It is by God's goodness and wisdom that these instinctive attractions have been implanted within us. Lacking them, we should remain in a state of indifference, and should not know how to satisfy the most urgent needs of our imperfect natures. The concupiscible appetite arouses us from our inertia and prevents us going without things which are necessary for us. And it is, further, a universal law that every creature, finding itself in the presence of an object which seems good to it, is at once drawn towards that object. But this movement towards the desired object

might result in a collision with some intervening obstacle, and the impulse would then be arrested, had not God endowed us with another faculty—the irascible appetite—which impels us to hurl the obstacle from our path or even to destroy it, in order to attain to the fruition of our desires.

These appetites, or instinctive movements of the soul, are impetuous, but blind.

They operate indiscriminately with regard to all objects which present a seductive appearance, whether lawful or forbidden. It is therefore impossible to obey them; we must, on the contrary, control and often repress them altogether. When man wishes to train the lower animals to his service he has first to overcome their instinctive tendencies, and far more must he conquer and dominate his own sensible appetites if he desires to continue faithful to the dictates of reason, and especially to the laws of religion.

28. But the attainment of this mastery is a work of much time. The senses play an important part and exercise a considerable influence in our lives; and as long as these have not been restrained and subdued they get the ascendancy over the other faculties instead of being dominated by them. The sensible faculties were the first of all our powers to awake; they are always ready to come into action, and to get the start of the spiritual faculties, so that if we are unable to master the first we shall never be able to control the second. He will never succeed in bridling his imagination who cannot rein in his looks, or conquer his will if he cannot curb his tongue.

This is the ground upon which the soldier of Christ must take his stand and fight his first battle—an obscure and inglorious battle, maybe, but one that is necessary, and very fruitful of results; a battle where the victory is not over others, but over our own selves.

A truly Christian mother should teach her children to conquer their senses from the outset, for before becoming proud, untruthful, or slothful, the child will be eager to hear, to see, to speak, to taste—eager, in a word, to enjoy

all the pleasures of sense, and he will be angry if he is hindered. If he be early accustomed to the control of his inclinations he will be stronger in the conquest of the other passions, and his victories in this strife will be more complete and durable.

He who by dint of persistent constancy in the strife attains to an almost complete mastery over the senses—ah, what tranquillity, what peace shall not he enjoy! Blessed Margaret Mary had achieved this victory over the senses when she said: "I desire no other pleasure than that of seeing myself engulfed in the sorrows of a pure suffering love." The pleasures of sense were as nothing to her any more. Before reaching this point she must have won many a victory; but, thanks to these repeated successes, everything in her was thenceforth subject to the empire of grace, and she enjoyed a true peace.

This restraining of the senses is no easy matter, and success will only be obtained by those who undertake the conflict for the sake of pleasing God. Many men succeed in exercising a certain amount of control over themselves, because they realize the excesses into which their appetites might lead them if they listened to them overmuch. But if they have no other motives, if they impose certain restraints upon their senses, either in order to avoid annoying consequences or to keep up a reputation for good conduct, they have already obtained their reward. God, for whose sake they have not striven, owes them no other recompense; and as they have waged war in their own strength, their victory will be incomplete, and inevitable defeat will come to remind them constantly of their weakness.

For it is God only who can give us this complete mastery over the senses, and who, whilst allowing them to be exercised within their legitimate limits, renders them innocuous. For they must be regulated, not destroyed; and according to the need must be called into use or left dormant.

§ 2. *The Sense of Sight.*

29. Of all the senses that of sight is the swiftest, and the one which most readily evades the control of the reason; it needs, therefore, the most vigilant attention. God has given us the sense of sight in order that we may contemplate His works, and for a thousand other needs as well. No useful function, no necessary duty, can be satisfactorily performed without its aid. He who has the charge of others, uses sight for the supervision of those under him. It is not to be destroyed, therefore, but restrained.

How many are the idle glances of which we might deprive ourselves, how many the curious sights which we might forgo, how many futile objects we might abstain from contemplating! And in close proximity to these last the eye often encounters some really dangerous object; for he who is unable to turn his eyes from frivolous spectacles will run great risk of being unable to refrain himself from questionable and forbidden things. David had served God faithfully under difficult circumstances; he had given proof of his faith, his courage, his piety, and his zeal. Yet *one* look which he knew not how to restrain kindled that fire in his passions which so fearfully ravaged his soul.

How much happier, how much more secure, are those who, like the holy patriarch Job, have "made a covenant with their eyes,"[1] and no longer allow them to follow all their idle fancies. The peace which such men enjoy is reflected in their outward demeanour, and is then called modesty. And this virtue, of which Our Lord has given us such a perfect example, is in no wise an unimportant one. "I beseech you, by the modesty of Jesus Christ," writes St. Paul to the Christians of Corinth (2 Cor. x. 1).

30. As there are many who do not understand the importance of inward peace, so many likewise fail to recognize the value of this exterior peace, of this virtue by which the

[1] Job xxxi. 1.

senses, and that of sight especially, are controlled and regulated, just as the inward peace regulates and controls the powers of the soul. Without peace the mind abandons itself to a thousand vagaries, the will to every kind of frivolous desire, while the imagination conjures up and incessantly pursues vain phantoms. Without modesty the senses throw open their approaches on every side, and through these avenues all the soul's enemies enter in. He who is not modest can never be master of himself; the smallest things occupy and excite his desires, the least circumstance disturbs his balance, temptations find their way as they please into his soul. He must see everything, know everything, taste everything, always excepting such things as are good and wholesome. Without the custody of the senses the most minute and assiduous care is lost upon a soul. As the costliest wines flow away through a broken vessel, so the soul, given up to the motions of sense, will rapidly lose all the good impressions which it may have received.

Modesty is the rampart by which our feeble virtue is protected and sheltered from the inroads of the enemy. It is the wall which guards our treasure; it is also the adornment of the faithful soul, whose charms are heightened thereby, rendering it more beautiful and attractive in the Heavenly Bridegroom's eyes. The world has no love for modest souls, for it sees that it has nothing to gain from them; their recollected demeanour repels worldlings, who instinctively avoid them and leave them to serve their Divine Master in peace.

It is most useful, then, to acquire this Christian modesty, and too much zeal cannot be brought to bear on the attempt. For it is hard to mortify the senses, it is hard to restrain this vagrant faculty of sight. But, in truth, this curtailing of the liberty of the eyes is merely the depriving ourselves of a small and passing satisfaction for the sake of one which is not only infinitely greater, but also eternal. In Heaven we shall know and taste God through all the

powers of the soul ; we shall attain Him by our spiritual faculties, the intelligence, and the will. While as for those faculties of sense which we shall still possess after the General Resurrection, they will be ravished by marvellous sights, melodies of inexpressible sweetness, perfumes of exquisite fragrance.

Those who have denied themselves the gratifications of the senses, the delight of the eyes, here, for God's sake, will taste of these celestial blessings in a more abundant measure ; above all, their understanding will penetrate more deeply into God's infinite greatness, their hearts will rejoice more abundantly in His love, a more radiant light will illumine their minds, and joys of a more intoxicating sweetness will fill their hearts. They have renounced some few empty delights, and in return God communicates Himself to them—God, the Food of the elect, the Eternal Bread, which they will have gained in the sweat of their brow ; He will nourish them and satisfy them for evermore.

§ 3. *The Sense of Hearing.*

31. The sense of hearing is a subtle and dangerous one, even more dangerous, perhaps, than sight itself. Face to face with a questionable spectacle, we can shut our eyes. But the ears cannot close themselves ; they must perforce hear what is said. There is but one way of escaping the evils which may come through the sense of hearing, and this is to fly from dangerous conversation, to break off all harmful talk, or, at any rate, to turn it into other channels.

Who is there who has not had occasion to strike his breast and say : " On more than one occasion I have lent a too-ready ear to certain conversations, to certain words, which were the occasion of regrettable thoughts finding their way into my soul, filling it with dissipation, vanity, worldliness, discontent and murmuring, bitterness and dislike."

And these are the least of the evils which are caused by

the sense of hearing: errors with regard to the most important principles, incredulity concerning the teachings of religion, an unwholesome curiosity, shameful thoughts and desires—are they not all sometimes the consequences of wrong conversations? How many souls have been lost because they have hearkened to things to which they should never have listened! What has been the beginning of the perdition of almost all those who lead an evil life? by what means has vice obtained access to their souls? Almost invariably by licentious conversations imprudently listened to.

To keep watch over our ears is therefore a matter of absolute necessity, since they are the channels through which the wicked may instil evil into our souls. Furthermore, even well-intentioned persons may do us an injury; perfectly innocent words may prove fatal to us. And this because men often hear what they wish to hear; or, at least, they imagine they hear what has never been said. They listen rather to their own thoughts than to the speaker's words, which they interpret in accordance with their own ideas. How often does it not happen that listeners find arguments in favour of their own erroneous opinions, encouragement to their own weaknesses, excuses for their own faults? They unconsciously add details which give quite another complexion to the facts, or they ignore such circumstances as are unfavourable. The same words, heard by persons of opposite opinions, wear a totally different aspect; the one side find approval for themselves and their friends, and condemnation for those whom they dislike; whilst their opponents draw an exactly opposite conclusion. Or if the words spoken displease, if they cannot be twisted into a favourable interpretation, they are very harshly judged, criticized, and disputed; thus they serve to keep alive antipathies, and to sharpen resentment. They are dwelt upon, in either case, for the purpose of feeding self-satisfaction or of increasing irritation. They are repeated over and over again, weighed,

scrutinized, plumbed, and their importance often exaggerated ; and so the passions are nourished, the judgment is warped, dissipation of mind becomes inevitable, and recollection impossible. And then think of the moments that are wasted, even those of prayer spent in the endeavour to remember the exact words that were heard and to extract their inferences, the imaginary conversations held, the regrets that such and such a reply had not been made, the inventing of smart repartees ! Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, and the indiscreet word, the unjust criticism, the harmful advice, the guilty approval, are the fruit of this licentiousness of the ill-regulated sense of hearing.

All these ills do not, of course, come simultaneously, but one or other is inevitable for those persons who are greedy to hear everything. How important is it, therefore, to check this inclination, to keep watch over our ears as over our eyes, to be able sometimes to deprive ourselves of news, to avoid useless conversations, to maintain ourselves circumspectly in recollection and in peace !

When we are compelled to hear, we must give only so much of our attention as is necessary. Truly faithful souls merely lend themselves, as it were, to the duties of their social life and to everything else which is not God Himself ; to Him alone they give themselves completely. Imperfect Christians, on the other hand, plunge head over ears into the conversations in which they take a part, just as they let themselves be taken captive by the objects which catch the eye ; their whole soul is absorbed, and its interior faculties are completely dominated by the senses.

It is only by vigorous action, therefore, and by generous sacrifices, that we can attain to the government of our hearing. It is only after painful struggles, after depriving ourselves again and again of the pleasures of social intercourse, after freely mortifying our curiosity, renouncing the hearing of useless bits of information, after having loved solitude and practised it, that it will be possible to face

necessary conversations without exposing ourselves to dissipation of mind, and to perform the duties of society in a manner befitting those who are the true children of God.

§ 4. *The Tongue as the Organ of Speech.*

32. He who listens, replies; he who is eager to hear is also usually eager to speak; the abuse of the sense of hearing is not separable, then, from the abuse of speech, and they bring the same evils in their train.

The desire to speak manifests itself early; the child with but few ideas already strives to express them. If nothing comes to restrain this inclination, it develops, and may degenerate into an insupportable craving to talk. People chatter without motive, from mere idleness, simply to give vent to anything, no matter what, that comes into their heads, and often without any particular reference to their audience; or they talk from vanity, to attract praise, or to excite admiration in the minds of their listeners; or from malice, to satisfy their feelings of antipathy, to give free course to the desire to disparage, to depreciate their neighbours, or in order to criticize or complain of them.

And even when no such ugly motive exists, even when the conversation has begun quite innocently, these same defects often creep in before one has time to perceive their coming: *In multiloquio non deerit peccatum* (In the multitude of words there shall not want sin—Prov. x. 19). Humility is wounded: we seize the opportunity of putting ourselves forward or of claiming some cheap superiority, of exhibiting our cleverness or prudence, our virtues or talents. Charity suffers: we speak of things about which we ought to keep silence, we repeat something that we cannot vouch for, give our impressions as facts, pronounce judgment upon false or doubtful evidence without taking all the circumstances into account or knowing motives. We magnify facts, we exaggerate unimportant details;

or else we generalize from an isolated fact and out of one fault of frailty we infer an habitual defect.

Do these persons think that Our Lord, assailed in His members, wounded in His affections—for He has died for those whom they dissect thus, He feeds them with His own Flesh, He dwells in them, He wills to be made one with them for all eternity—do they imagine that He will look with favour on this clever talker, that He will be struck with his witticisms, his smart hits, that He will be pleased to see him usurping the right which belongs to God alone —that of sitting in judgment upon men ? No ; words contrary to charity drive away grace from the soul and deprive it of the Divine blessing, and many persons who lament that they no longer receive the consolations of piety owe it to the intemperance of their tongues.

The passions become inflamed by these culpable conversations, we become animated and excited as we talk. The resentment which some wrong or fancied wrong had left behind, grows as we speak of it. Aversion increases as we recall all our grievances against our neighbour and point out his wrong-doings ; and so we communicate our dislike to those who listen to us.

Recollection becomes impossible henceforth. The ideas which our words have stirred up fill the mind and leave small space for pious thoughts or the remembrance of God.

Again, conversations may be repeated, and from one imprudent word carried to the person concerned, may follow vexations, disunion, discord, and hatred.

Such are the evils arising from intemperate speech ; and we have passed over in silence all lascivious, impious, and blasphemous words.

33. "Behold," says St. James, "how small a fire kindleth a great wood." And the tongue is this destroying engine "being set on fire by Hell," which can consume our lives. It is "a world of iniquity . . . placed among our members, which defileth the whole body" (St. Jas iii. 5, 6). It can bring the whole man to perdition.

And yet, although the tongue is capable of causing such terrible evils, it is also the source of much good. "By it we bless God and the Father, and by it we curse men who are made after the likeness of God" (St. Jas. iii. 9). "Blessing and cursing;" prayer and Divine praise, equally with cursing, blasphemy, and impiety, proceed out of the same mouth. Happy he who regulates it well!

"If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man" (St. Jas. iii. 2). He is the ruler of his whole nature with all its desires, he is the master of his inclinations. "He is able with a bridle to lead about the whole body. For we put bits into the mouths of horses that they may obey us, and we turn about their whole body. Behold also ships, whereas they are great and are driven by strong winds, yet they are turned about with a small helm whithersoever the governor willeth" (St. Jas. iii. 4). "But every nature of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of the rest, is tamed, and hath been tamed, by the nature of man," says St. James again, "but the tongue no man can tame" (St. Jas. iii. 7, 8). No man *alone*, that is. He needs God's help, and God gives this assistance only to those sincere and generous souls who practise silence and abstain from useless speech, who seek after solitude and refrain from conversation with the creature, in order that they may the better converse with God.

When God had made choice of Moses for the deliverance of His people, He so ordered events that he was led to quit the noisy court of the King of Egypt, and withdraw into a thinly peopled country, there to lead the solitary, peaceful life of a shepherd. Great was the tribulation amongst the children of Israel; it would have seemed as though the need of succour were urgent. But God left Moses for no less than forty years in this semi-savage country, and it was not until after this long period of retreat that He found him ripe for the great mission which He was about to confide to him.

It was in the desert, too, that St. John the Baptist took

refuge from his infancy, in order that he might grow in the love of God, and become capable of exercising his office as the forerunner of the Christ. Jesus Himself, our Divine Model, after thirty years of a hidden and often silent life, passed forty days in the desert before beginning to preach His Gospel.

And since that time every soul athirst for perfection has aspired after recollection and solitude. All the holy founders of the religious Orders, without any exception, have imposed silence as one of the fundamental rules, as one of the great means of forming souls in the interior life; and we recognize the fervent soul by the way in which it observes this great law of silence.

And even in the world, all those persons who aspire to the perfect life should shun the vortex of worldly affairs, and avoid, even in the exercise of their zeal, any excess of exterior works, imposing upon themselves hours of recollection, when, alone with God, they may give themselves up to outpourings of their love, and taste the sweetness of a purely celestial conversation.

§ 5. *The Tongue as the Organ of Taste.*

34. Of all our senses, sight and hearing are the least material and the noblest. Our gaze can attain to an object without receiving a stain, the sounds which strike upon the ears do not soil them. If, notwithstanding this, these two senses so urgently require to be governed and repressed, how much more must the sense of taste, so material and gross as it is, be ruled and bridled? To incorporate into ourselves vile aliments, to transmute dead flesh, the carcass of some animal, into our own systems, this is a humiliating necessity to which a noble soul submits only with a certain legitimate shame. And we blush less to confess ourselves as being eager to see, curious to learn, than as gluttonous. We quite openly try to feast our eyes on all sorts of spectacles, to satiate our ears with news;

but we satisfy our voracity in secret, we have recourse to strategy, or we seek excuses. The man is conscious of degrading himself when he passes the bounds defined by reason, when he consumes food, or swallows drink, no longer because of his needs, but for the gratification of his passions. He knows how he debases himself in thus giving his sensual instincts the predominance over his superior faculties; and does he not put himself on the same level as the beasts when he ceases to listen to reason, and follows his animal instincts only?

And then the effect of gluttony is to diminish the keenness of the intellect, and make the soul less apt to receive the impressions and illuminations of grace. Esau, the sensual man, who sold his birthright and his father's blessing for a pottage of lentils, had small understanding of the value of spiritual advantages, and he seems to have appreciated them more lightly still, when he had yielded once again to his gluttony. "And so, taking bread and the pottage of lentils, he ate and drank and went his way, making little account of having sold his first birthright" (Gen. xxv. 34). So those Hebrews who, in the desert, sighed for the flesh-pots of Egypt, and murmured because they were deprived of them, scarcely understood the benefit of having been snatched out of slavery and saved from the danger of becoming idolaters like their oppressors. Those sons of Heli equally failed to understand the privileges and duties of their charge, when they violated the laws of their religion, and scandalized the people by requiring that the flesh of the sacrifice should be given to them without first burning the fat, that they might dress it to their own taste (1 Kings ii. 13-17). To them it was a small matter to turn the people aside from the manner of sacrifice prescribed by the law, provided that they could satisfy their own sensuality. Their conduct drew down the vengeance of Heaven, and they themselves were the first victims.

Is it worthy of a reasonable being to disturb himself

as to the quality of his food, to enjoy it in advance, to plunge with delight into these coarse satisfactions, or to complain if his meals do not altogether meet the requirements of a refined taste? The more we yield to this low pleasure the less concerned do we become with regard to spiritual things. Our capacity for laying hold of them diminishes, and our inclination to search after them grows continually less—*Animalis homo non percipit ea quæ sunt Spiritus Dei* ("The sensual man," says St. Paul, "perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God"—1 Cor. ii. 14). "Take heed to yourselves," Our Lord tells us, "lest perhaps your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness" (St. Luke xxi. 34).

35. He who makes himself the slave of this material sense of taste, and gives the flesh the mastery over the spirit, exposes himself to a still more shameful servitude. "Behold this was the iniquity of Sodom thy sister," says the prophet Ezechiel to Jerusalem, "pride, fulness of bread, and abundance" (Ezech. xvi. 49); and, according to St. Paul, the abuse of wine brings luxury in its train. *Vino, in quo est luxuria* (Wine, wherein is luxury—Eph. v. 18); while the author of the Book of Proverbs had already said: *Luxuriosa res vinum* (Wine is a luxurious thing—Prov. xx. 1).

On the other hand, he who knows how to govern this gross sense, how to subdue and reduce it by mortification, fasting, and abstinence, he is able to rise above the low preoccupations of the baser appetites, and becomes disposed to receive the illuminations of wisdom. He draws down upon himself the blessing of Heaven. *Bona est oratio cum jejunio* ("Prayer is good"—that is to say, efficacious —"with fasting," said the Angel Raphael to Tobias—Tob. xii. 8). Before receiving the Tables of the Law, Moses fasted forty days and forty nights. Holy Scripture also shows us the Israelites fasting upon important occasions, the prophets encouraging them and giving them the example in order that they might obtain the Divine protection. Our Blessed Lord, by His example, consecrated the practice

of fasting ; all the saints of the new law have imitated their Divine model in this, and have practised, at times with great severity, both abstinence and fasting.

Alas ! in our days fasting has become all too rare ; while even amongst good Christians a studied carefulness and delicacy about food is far too common. This, doubtless, is one of the reasons why so many good and pious souls, having failed to get the entire mastery over their senses, are often lacking in real energy, and are seemingly incapable of manly virtues.

The moral tone of the day, which makes so universally for refinement ; the facility, greater than it has ever been before in all classes of society, with which the palate can be indulged in the pleasures that it covets, have favoured this abuse. But many opportunities for privation still remain ; poverty, sickness, or, at any rate, want of appetite, and the caprices of a weak stomach often stand in the way of the gratification of our particular tastes. And how many persons are there who have no choice, but must content themselves, whether they will or no, with what is provided for them ! But how few know how to give a supernatural value to these small privations ! When they are not actually irritable, most people take them stolidly, as inevitable inconveniences, whilst they ought to accept them heartily for the love of God, happy in being able to offer Him this slight sacrifice.

§ 6. *The Sense of Touch.*

36. It is not merely the omission to mortify their tastes, but a general tenderness towards their bodies, which hinders so great a number of Christian souls from making progress. "For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh," says St. Paul (Gal. v. 17). The desires of the flesh are contrary to the desires of the spirit, and those of the spirit contrary to those of the flesh. The first degrade man to the brutes, the second uplift him to the

Angels. The body and the soul, then, having such opposite tendencies, it is not possible to favour the one without weakening the other. So those who cherish the body, who follow the wisdom of the flesh, finding, that is to say, fine arguments by which to arrive at this conclusion, "Let us take care of the body, and exercise our best skill in procuring for it all the pleasures which it desires," become more and more indifferent to spiritual things. "For they that are according to the flesh," says St. Paul again, "mind the things that are of the flesh; but they that are according to the spirit mind the things that are of the spirit. For the wisdom of the flesh is death; but the wisdom of the spirit is life and peace. Because the wisdom of the flesh is an enemy to God. . . . And they who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. viii. 5-8).

Do not these true and forcible words of the Apostle suffice to show how necessary it is to mortify the flesh, and how pernicious is their error who will not recognize the importance of this duty of mortification?

"It is a great delusion," says Father Surin, "on the part of those spiritual invalids who, through cowardice and self-love, try to persuade themselves that bodily mortification is of small importance, and that interior mortification is everything. On this principle you do no violence to the body, refuse it none of its gratifications. You take great care of yourself, you go about, you see your friends; then by means of one simple glance towards God a soul fancies itself established in the mystical life. This doctrine was unknown to the Saints. In these days people have discovered a mild kind of spirituality which just suits human nature. It consists in beautiful ideas and sublime thoughts, studied discourses, and an affected recollection" (*Dialogues*, vol. i., book iv.). "I tremble," says Father Faber, "when people speak much of interior mortification; it sounds so like a confession that they are leading comfortable lives" (*Growth in Holiness*, chap. xi., p. 178, second edition).

St. Paul spoke quite otherwise. "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh, you shall die: but if by the Spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live" (Rom. viii. 12, 13). "Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, to restrain yourselves from carnal desires which war against the soul," says St. Peter (1 St. Pet. ii. 11).

And what these great Saints recommended, they also practised. "But I chastise my body and bring it into subjection" (1 Cor. ix. 27). "Always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies. For we who live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake; that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our mortal flesh "(2 Cor. iv. 10).

37. It is never without astonishment that we read, in the lives of the Saints, of their mortifications. And yet, could it have been otherwise? These great souls, on fire with the love of God, could they have dealt delicately with a rebellious nature? Would they ever have arrived at that degree of love which made them thirsty for suffering, if from the beginning of their spiritual life they had not waged a generous warfare with the flesh?

And the fact is that it is necessary to engage in this combat from the moment when we first apply ourselves seriously to God's service. Even those who, without aiming at a sublime degree of virtue, merely desire to become good and perfect Christians, must make war against the flesh.

"If denied lawful pleasures," says St. Alphonsus Liguori, "the body will not dare to seek forbidden indulgence, but if continually gratified by every innocent enjoyment, it will soon draw the soul into sinful gratification" (*True Spouse*, chap. viii. 61). Delicacy in the nurture of the body and real virtue are never to be found together. You cannot love your comforts, make a study of what is convenient, and at the same time devote yourself

entirely to the service of God and your neighbour. You cannot both coddle and deny yourself. "And they that are Christ's have crucified their flesh with the vices and concupiscences" (Gal. v. 24).

The Christian soul has three enemies to combat, the Flesh, the World, and the Devil. While the last two are alone, they are easily vanquished, because their attacks are from without. But if the enemy within the citadel (that is, the flesh) joins forces with them, and if its strength is unimpaired, the fight will be much more severe, and complete victory almost impossible. We must therefore reduce the vitality of this domestic foe; to treat it delicately would only be to strengthen it. To continue to act towards it merely upon the defensive, imagining that we may be satisfied if we do not actually yield to its requirements, would be a delusion. They who take up this attitude do not maintain it; they soon begin to make lamentable concessions, to sustain innumerable defeats. It is necessary to take the offensive, to harry and maltreat the flesh, in order to vanquish and overcome it.

And we must carry on this warfare always; the exactions of the flesh are perpetually reborn, perpetually growing. Resist them successfully, and a moment later they renew the attack; yield to them and they only become more arrogant, for the more you give, the more they will claim. If you again yield, nature's lower instincts will end by taking the upper hand, the carnal desires will become tyrannical, and make of human life a mere animal existence.

It is this continuity of the struggle which makes it so especially painful. You would like to compound with the enemy, and soon you seek pretexts for treating it less rigorously. And, you find them, alas! You are delighted to give yourself fine reasons for your course of action, happier still when you have succeeded in getting these reasons approved by prudent councillors (prudent, that is, with the prudence of the flesh), who, over-tender with themselves, will not permit to others practices which they

do not themselves perform. They profess to consider that bodily mortification is superfluous, and hold that its place is advantageously supplied by the performance of the duties of one's state, and by the trials of daily life. As if anyone could perfectly fulfil his duties without subduing his flesh, as if anyone could be really patient without being mortified !

38. The Church, by her law of fasting, imposes this active mortification of the flesh upon everyone, showing thereby how necessary a thing it is. This is especially the case for those whom Our Lord has called to a higher state of perfection. It should also be more than commonly generous in those in whom the sublimity of their vocation as the spouses of Jesus Christ, or as His ministers, obliges to a higher level of virtue. It imposes itself, above all, upon those who, bearing a tender devotion to the Church, desire to offer themselves for her. They should follow their Lord's example, and unite their sufferings to her sufferings, their expiations to her expiations. It would be a grave error to think to carry on the work of Jesus Christ, to wish to be associated in His mission of salvation, and not to adopt the means which He employed. We are members of Christ ; a mysterious union exists between Him and us, as between the vine and the branches, between the head and the members. Thus, Jesus, having loved the Church to the point of delivering Himself to death for her, unable to suffer any more for her in His own flesh, asks us for ours in order that in us He may continue His work. This is what St. Paul teaches us, and this is what that great Apostle himself also performed. " Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh for His body, which is the Church " (Col. i. 24).

By these sufferings Jesus appeased the Divine justice, so that there fell upon mankind, not well-merited chastisements, but blessings. And those who take upon themselves to suffer thus with Him in order to complete His work,

obtain the same results. They were already powerful by their prayers, but since they have joined prayer to sacrifice, God has no longer been able to resist them, they obtain of Him all that they ask. "We can hardly believe," Father Surin says, "how much God delights to see the flesh humbled and made submissive to the spirit. The courage which is thus manifested wrests, as it were, from His hands all that we seek to obtain from Him" (*Spiritual Dialogues*, vol. i., book i., chap. iii.). And that which these generous Christians obtain before all, that which they seek most ardently, is the redoubling of their love, for love impels to penance, and penance increases love. "A soul wounded by the love of Jesus Christ," Father Balthazar Alvarez used to say, "cannot rest unless her body shares in this blessed wound; otherwise it seems as if she neither loved nor imitated Him as she ought." And the soul is emphatically right in its judgment; it is very certain, also, that those persons who do not desire to practise any bodily mortifications are not aglow with the fire of charity. Those who practise them with purity of intention are actuated thereto by love, a love which is strong in proportion to the price which is exacted from nature. Each fresh suffering inflicted cries aloud: "My God, it is for Thee." And as love grows by this exercise of love, it takes on wonderful developments in the generous heart.[1]

In Heaven the mortified soul will love God more; and since eternal felicity is nothing but love satisfied, how great will be its happiness! What marks of affection, what pure caresses will it not receive from Him for the love of

[1] Those persons who discourage and sometimes, without serious reasons, forbid the practising of bodily penances would not be willing to extinguish the lamp burning before the Blessed Sacrament. Apart from the liturgical precept, they would rightly regard this as a very wrong action. But which is the cause of greater glory to God, this lamp which consumes itself unconsciously in His honour, or the generous Christian, whose voluntary sufferings form a long series of acts of love, and offer to the Divine Justice these all too necessary expiations?

whom it martyrized itself here below! How great will be its love for God, how great the love of which it will be the object! One of the most austere saints that ever lived, St. Peter of Alcantara, appeared to St. Teresa after his death in resplendent glory—"Oh, blessed penance," he said, "which has won me such a weight of glory."

CHAPTER VI

THE IDOLATRY OF CHRISTIAN PEOPLE

Filioli custodite vos a simulacris (My little children, keep yourselves from idols).—1 JOHN v. 21.

§ 1. *How the Passions may become Idols.*

39. THOSE who strive generously, putting all their trust in God, invariably achieve the victory. The battle may be long, but success is assured. Those who fight half-heartedly, but without laying down their arms; those who, although destitute of fervour, do not go so far as to neglect prayer, who make certain efforts and gather themselves up again faithfully after each fall, while abstaining from taking the offensive—from setting to work vigorously, that is to say, to practise the virtues opposed to their defects—these are neither victors nor vanquished. They make no progress, and never become really strong, but they do not fall into the hands of the enemy.

Those who yield and never repent, those whose lives are a series of capitulations, end by being definitely conquered and falling into slavery. They are then dominated, tyrannized over, by their evil inclinations; while, far from groaning under this servitude, they accept it, they love it, they refuse to make any effort to escape from it.

But the only sovereignty which man should accept is God's sovereignty. When he bows under the Divine yoke, prostrating himself before the Lord of the Universe, submitting his will to God's will, paying Him His due worship, man honours himself and becomes greater. When, on the contrary, he makes himself the slave of his senses—when,

seduced by the deceitful charm of the creature, he bows down before it, alienating his liberty in order to give vice an absolute dominion in his heart, he most shamefully degrades and debases himself.

But, above all, he is refusing to God the empire which He alone has the right to exercise; he is renewing the disorders of idolatry which, under the old law, so greatly inflamed God's anger, and drew down the most terrible chastisements upon the chosen people. Other sins were, for the most part, punished only in the persons of the actual sinners; but when the Israelitish people tolerated idolatry, all were held responsible, and the retribution fell upon the whole nation. It was made subject to its enemies, and the heathen became the instruments of the Divine vengeance.

The leaders of the children of Israel—Moses, the judges, the kings, the prophets—were perpetually waging war against idolatry and renewing their efforts to root out this terrible evil; but it was constantly springing up afresh, so prone is poor human nature to make to itself idols.

In these days the Divine anger seems to be directed against the Christian nations; God allows the enemies of His Name to persecute them that believe. And have not these believers also, by like transgressions, deserved the chastisements which fall upon them?

It is true that we no longer bow down to idols of wood and stone; we should blush at such folly. But are we less guilty when we give ourselves up to our passions? He who, without a struggle, gives way to mortal sin, does he not dethrone God? For the Almighty no longer reigns in the heart that carries its homage and its worship to false gods.

40. Let no one be astonished at our giving the name of idolatry to the conduct of the Christian who gives up the contest and abandons himself to his vicious inclinations. Has not the Holy Ghost, by the mouth of St. Paul, called

gluttony and covetousness idolatry? "Whose god is their belly," he says (Phil. iii. 19). And elsewhere: "The covetous man, who is an idolater" (Eph. v. 5).

A single uncombated passion may become an idol, but we must not think ourselves on the verge of idolatry because we have not conquered it completely. When people begin to give way to a wrong inclination, they are disposed to deceive themselves with regard to it. They still fancy themselves free; they proclaim in all sincerity that in taking such-and-such a decision, and in holding to it afterwards in spite of objections and obstacles, they only follow reason and prove their strength of character; whilst in reality they merely obey an unavowed passion, which they strengthen by this very obedience. If they yield often enough, a day will come when its empire over them will be exercised openly, and resistance will become extremely difficult.

In order to determine the real worth of a soul, and to know whether it is a slave to any vice, we must examine into the causes which give rise to its desires, which excite its powers and delight its heart. An unresisted passion penetrates every part of the soul, and so a man's glances, the subject of his conversations, his favourite books—all these things show his tendencies and reveal the false god which he adores. What are the objects towards which his thoughts most readily turn? what the recollections which his memory feasts upon? Are the things which he voluntarily pursues lawful? Even if not in themselves forbidden, yet the soul which loves them supremely, desiring them at all costs, even to bargaining with the Divine law in order to enjoy them, is truly an idolater.

41. Again, to know the real worth of a soul we must search into the dispositions of the superior faculties, the intelligence and, still more, the will. God reigns over a people when the authorities who govern it profess to follow His laws. He reigns in a soul when the superior faculties are subject to Him, and this more especially in

the case of the will, that chief of all the powers. What end does the will propose to itself? What is the motive of its resolutions? In its various actions, is it aiming at the accomplishment of its own salvation, and at pleasing God? If this is the intention which it formulates in all sincerity before taking any action, it does not cease to perform acts which are pleasing to Him, even although it should afterwards, for a time, lose the thought of God. Amongst the recollections which fill the memory, amongst the phantoms which invade the imagination, amongst the attractions which disturb the heart, and the desires which solicit it, there may be many which are quite involuntary, and which are repelled at the very outset.

The real springs of its actions, those which it deliberately responds to, are what we have to consider. The soul that habitually obeys the sensual instincts leads a degraded and bestial existence; if it habitually listens to the voice of reason, it acts like a philosopher, while if it is ordinarily influenced by supernatural motives, it lives by faith.

It is, alas! not rare, even amongst Christians, to find souls who have no other object than the satisfaction of the instincts of concupiscence. And then the perverted will subjects the other powers of the soul to the service of the idol. Instead of applying the resources of its intelligence to useful things, it simply employs them in order to find the means of enjoyment. It nourishes the imagination with thoughts by which passion is called into being; it feeds the memory with past events wherein evil desires found a source of gratification. Men sometimes go so far as to sacrifice everything to their idols—fortune, health, even honour. They bring sorrow upon parents who are deserving of all respect and affection; they turn their backs upon the most devoted friends; they care no longer for either God or man.

42. Do we not see examples of this folly round about us? There are entire families which are no longer obedient to God's laws, many homes wherein God is dethroned. He

sees His creatures bowing down to the god of wealth, to the god of pride, or to the god of voluptuousness, and even to the three at once. Their thoughts are wholly directed to pleasure and vanity; one would suppose that they had been placed upon this earth merely for themselves and their idols. Will the Divine justice spare these insolent men whose lives seem one act of defiance to their Creator? *Qui habitat in cœlis irridebit eos: et Dominus subsannabit eos* (He that dwelleth in Heaven shall laugh at them; and the Lord shall deride them—Ps. ii. 4). "I will laugh at you," says this mighty God to the sinner. "You think that I forget you because I allow you to plunge into the vile enjoyment of your passions, but the day will come when you shall feel the weight of My anger. You will cry then and say, 'Lord, Lord, save us!' And I shall make answer unto you: 'No longer am I your Lord and your God; you have chosen vain idols rather than Me. Where are now those false gods to whom you have paid your polluted worship? Call on them, and see whether they can deliver you from your ills.'"

Idolatry has reigned in the world for centuries, and terrible will be the evils which it will engender; the barbarous morals of this unhappy age are at once its consequence and its chastisement. But God did not punish the sin of idolatry as severely in heathen nations as in the case of His own children. His justice requires most of those to whom He has given most. The children of Israel who fell into idolatry were far more guilty than those who had not received so much light, who had not heard God's voice, calling them back to their duty. The Catholic nations possess the fulness of truth; the aids by means of which they may live in conformity with the law of God are granted to them in profusion. When they abuse these advantages, their responsibility is far greater, the chastisement in store for them far heavier. Our beloved France, which was so abundantly dowered with heavenly gifts, which has so often heard the warnings and

exhortations of God's friends, which has seen so many saintly examples—that favoured country in which the works of salvation have been so many—has it not abused these graces? And how deeply has it not therefore sinned, offering sacrifice to idols![1]

The modern idols are many, and the chief amongst them are easily distinguished. The love of sensual pleasure and pride are the gods which reign to-day. They are the dominant passions in the hearts of the majority of mankind, robbing the Almighty of that place which is His due.

§ 2. *The Love of the Pleasures of Sense.*

43. The love of sensual pleasure is a degrading passion which results in the obscuring of the intelligence and the weakening of the whole character. Thus it is that we have seen men of talent stupefied, as it were, by vice, or brave men sapped of their energy after being the heroes of mighty conflicts; while others whom we have once known as full of affection and kindliness become hard-hearted, and exhibit the blackest ingratitude.

And, further, the vicious man does not seal up within himself the corruption upon which he feeds, and which he breathes out through every pore. His heart, having become a reservoir in which all the impurities gathered by the senses are stored up, overflows upon all around; while his tongue distils its poisoned filth, which is all too often a source of pollution to those who come near him.

[1] We see many more small families now, the result of deliberate intention, and is not this an instance of a love of comfort carried to the point of idolatry, and the cause of that infamous persecution which attacks the infant's soul at the very outset? Such a serious evil cannot fail to draw down the most terrible consequences upon a nation. Is it not also an idolatrous love of temporal advantages which in so many provinces leads Catholics to send to Parliament men who are the enemies of God and of the Church, merely for the sake of obtaining Government favours? And how many public functionaries and magistrates sacrifice their duties as Christians, as judges, to their own interests? Is not this, again, to deny God for an idol?

§ 3. *Pride.*

44. Voluptuousness is the most degrading of all the passions, but it is not the hardest to cure or the most dangerous. Separation from, and, above all, the deceptions and treacheries of those by whom he believed himself to be loved, may bring a man back from the idolatry of the creature to the worship of the true God. Sickness may compel the sensualist to control his gross inclinations ; serious reverses may detach the avaricious from worldly possessions. At times also the example of virtuous lives may make the debauchee enter into himself ; the drunkard, his health undermined by excesses, groans over his fatal tendency ; a wholesome feeling of shame takes possession of those who have been weak enough to yield to all these vices, and occasionally, at any rate, they will conceive a longing to escape from their degradation. But pride, the fatuous admiration for his own qualities, the idolatry of the *me*—who will cure this grave disease ? The proud man is satisfied with himself ; he perceives none of his faults, he sees no reason for wishing to alter his life.

The proud man is his own idol ; he holds to it even more tenaciously than the miser to his gold, than the sensualist to the pleasures of the table, or the man caught in some guilty entanglement to the object of his infatuation. Those who carry their incense to other idols admit by this very fact that something is wanting in themselves, and that they require to seek it outside. The proud man, on the contrary, will in no wise admit his own poverty, or owe anything to any other creature. Troubles and obstacles which often daunt other sinners and check their rebellion only irritate the proud man, and strengthen, instead of weakening, his pride. For he kicks against humiliations, and inflates himself the more if anyone seeks to belittle him.

45. What a terrible disorder pride becomes when, from

never being resisted, it develops to the point of deserving the name of idolatry ! He indeed is a self-worshipper who makes himself the centre of everything, who feasts himself upon the contemplation of his fancied qualities, judging his fellow-creatures severely, despising them, and considering himself superior to everyone. Nothing can undeceive him. All those who come near him are disgusted with his self-sufficiency, his ridiculous presumption ; but he remains none the less pleased with himself. He is so enamoured of self, he makes so little of all that is *not* self, that even God is of small account in his eyes. Such is his confidence in his own industry and talents that he feels no need of the Divine assistance. One would think that he could dispense with God—that he aspires to usurp His place, and direct the affairs of the world. If anyone points out to him that God's designs may be in opposition to his private aims, and that all his efforts may therefore be in vain, the thought revolts him. There exists within him a germ of that pretension of Lucifer : " I will ascend above the height of the clouds ; I will be like the Most High " (Isa. xiv. 14).

He adores himself, and he also wishes to be adored. That people should think about him, should occupy themselves with him, is a joy to him ; to be admired and loved is a yet greater delight. But still he is not satisfied. He demands that others should be subject to him, for he has a thirst for power. In order to be really contented, he must be able to impose the laws of his will and the decrees of his own wisdom upon others.

And to what devices will he not resort to secure admiration ! Before clever people he too must be clever ; he displays his powers of imagination, his knowledge, his ability. With the virtuous he shows himself a strong advocate of virtue ; he affects the language of probity and integrity, he inveighs loudly against vice. The wish to obtain admiration is never absent from him ; it makes him compose his countenance, dress his phrases, disguise

his thoughts. Sweet simplicity has no attraction for him. "What will my audience think of me?" This is his continual anxiety. If needs be, he will relinquish his own ideas, he will run counter to his own tastes; for what would he not sacrifice to his desire of being admired? And if he exaggerates his merits, he also always finds excuses for his faults; he conceals his weaknesses. If he is without any particular virtue, he simulates it; he will even at times control his other passions in order to satisfy his pride. Is he lazy? He will shake off his slothfulness; he will accomplish difficult tasks in the hope of magnifying himself in his own eyes and in the eyes of others. Such were the haughty Pharisees, whom Our Lord reproached with practising their virtues to be seen of men. The vain man is not only capable of almsgiving and fasting (as was the case with these enemies of Our Lord), but he is so athirst for admiration that he even strives to win it by acts which, if inspired by a better motive, would deserve to be called heroic. Gladiators and others greedy for glory have been seen to face death calmly and impassively, having no other care at that awful moment than the thought of bequeathing a reputation for courage to posterity.

46. Of what blindness is not this pride the cause! The humble man is honest and sincere; convinced as he is of his own misery, and making confession of it to God, he does not endeavour to hide it from men, and thus all his paths are truth. He is simple and upright in all his doings, with the great and the small, the learned and the ignorant. He is at peace, not being troubled as to what anyone might say or think about him; he is a stranger to those agonies which the proud man endures—agonies as numerous as the persons with whom he comes in contact.

But the proud man is not in search of truth. Absorbed as he is in the desire to please or to astonish, he sets himself to deceive others by seductive appearances. He likes to deceive himself, and, wishing at all costs to rise in his

own esteem, he ends by thinking himself quite different from what he really is. Those alone know the truth who sincerely desire to do so. The proud man fears it, because it would show him his transgressions, and so he flies in the opposite direction. Is it necessary to add that the Devil, the Father of Lies, encourages this fatal tendency, encompasses the proud man with his snares, entangles him in a host of misconceptions and false ideas, obscures his intellect and enshrouds it little by little in a thick darkness ? Very soon these errors, consented to, desired and sought after, become invincible, and the proud man finishes by persuading himself that everyone takes him at his own high valuation. If he *could* fear that he might be mistaken, he would perhaps pray for that light which God grants to the humble. But he loves his delusion, and he intends to go on admiring and idolizing himself to the end.

And what deplorable consequences ensue : jealousy with regard to those who might eclipse him ; antipathy—hatred, even—towards those who fail to admire, or refuse to submit to him ; anger when he is contradicted or thwarted.

47. The proud man is a docile instrument in Satan's hands ; the Enemy of mankind prefers him to the miser, to the sensual, and even to the impure man, as an assistant in his work of perverting souls. For the proud man, provided that he knows how to conceal his repulsive arrogance and to avoid exciting disgust, dominates weaker natures and forces them to accept his errors, or he ingratiates himself by his flatteries. For all means are good to him provided that he be accepted as a teacher whose words must be listened to, as a clever man whose advice is to be followed.

All the heresiarchs were inordinately proud ; in all times those who have founded false schools, who have been the originators, or even the propagators, of false doctrines, who have tampered with their brothers' faith and in many instances destroyed it, have been drawn to these novelties

of belief by their exaggerated confidence in their own enlightenment. They made an idol of their knowledge or their talents; unconsciously at first, and then deliberately, they have cast God out of their hearts by denying the Divine teaching. These men are the real agents of Satan.

So it is with those who, in the Church's conflicts, side with her enemies; those who, without breaking with her openly, show disloyal tendencies, throwing doubt upon her teachings, criticizing the measures taken by those in authority. What is the motive with which they are usually inspired but that of an infatuation for self?

48. The cases in which this insane pride makes a man an idolater of his own person, are less rare than might be supposed. Perhaps the reader is now thinking: "I am very far from falling into these deplorable follies. I do not blind myself to *this* point; I do not sacrifice everything to the wish to please or to shine. I am aware that I may not be particularly humble, but I see no signs of this senseless pride." It is true that those who read these pages have not, thank God, arrived at the excess which we have just depicted; but do not let us forget that in order to know any monster thoroughly, it is necessary to study it in the adult stage! To get a correct idea of a tree you must not examine it when the first shoot is rising above the ground. The newly hatched snake cannot yet kill with its fangs; the poisonous plant, when it first appears, is still harmless. But take the serpent and rear it, cultivate the poisonous plant, and the day will come when the one and the other will be able to destroy the life of the imprudent person who has cherished them.

The budding voluptuousness, the pride which is just beginning to show itself, bears within it the seeds of perdition. If it does not actually slay, it paralyzes, it destroys the spiritual vigour. Those who fight feebly and make concessions to their passions, who yield deliberately to the love of ease, to sensual pleasures, to feelings of self-complacency (more especially when the yielding becomes

habitual), are doing to their souls an injury the gravity of which they do not understand; they are hindering their progress in the path of perfect virtue; they are depriving themselves for all eternity of that superabundance of joy and glory which Our Saviour reserves in Heaven for those who have been His true friends here below.

Those, on the other hand, who, realizing the hideousness of these two vices, and how displeasing they are to God, wage a relentless war against them, acquire by this means alone a title to the Divine favours.

Reader, if you have no cause to reproach yourself even of weakness with regard to these worst enemies of your salvation, if your generous soul is sullied only with those few light faults which proceed from the frailty of our poor human nature and are not the result of a considered and deliberate consent, it was none the less important that you should be shown the grave disorders into which a large number of your brethren fall. Your compassion for sinners will be increased thereby, and you will the better understand what prayers, what sacrifices, are necessary to obtain their conversion and their salvation.

You will also understand what expiations such sins call for. It was to an innocent soul that the Immaculate Virgin at Lourdes spoke the words: "Penance! penance! penance!" Mary desired that this call, addressed to Bernadette, should be heard by all alike—by the just no less than by sinners. Has she been obeyed? And is it not because the good have not thought to make expiation for the guilty that the Divine Justice is smiting us to-day? The expiatory oblations of God's friends are of the greatest worth in His eyes; they are necessary for the appeasing of His justice, and if they are not offered voluntarily, will He not exact them after another and a yet more terrible manner?

CHAPTER VII

LOVE OF SELF IN GOOD PEOPLE

Non efficiamur inanis gloriæ cupidi (Let us not be made desirous of vainglory).—GAL. v. 26.

§ I. *Vanity.*

49. IN describing the hideous idolatry into which an uncombated pride may lead the soul, have we said enough? In stating that to give a deliberate consent to feelings of self-complacency, even in small things, is to do serious harm to the soul, have we made the danger of this self-love clear enough, and put souls sufficiently on their guard against this interior enemy which is so perfidious and dangerous? Alas for this enemy! How many souls are there who admit its formidable character, lament that they are the subjects of its attacks, and yet continue to yield to it. They certainly refuse to go as far as it would have them go, but they travel half-way. Two opposite sentiments are contending in their hearts, and neither obtains the full victory. They detest and at the same time they have a tender feeling for this disordered self-love.

It is a characteristic of the human heart to be attached to its affections. The fervent soul delights in loving God; it wishes to love Him more; it prays earnestly for the redoubling of its devotion, and it multiplies its efforts to attain thereto. The sinner, bound by the cords of a guilty affection, clings to his slavery; he obstinately rejects every invitation to renounce his infatuation. To all lovers the thought that their love may one day have an end is heart-rending. So with those in whom two conflicting loves

are striving for the mastery—the love of God and a sinful love of the creature; or a legitimate love for our parents, and an affection which these parents condemn.

Such persons are in torment because they do not wish to renounce either of these affections.

So with the vain man who only resists half-heartedly. He loves his vanity; this failing, of which he may be ashamed, flatters him and pleases him, notwithstanding. So, too, he who gives way to his susceptibility actually admires it. He loudly protests that it is necessary to be careful of his honour, and that he should consider himself weak and without character if he were to allow his neighbour to fail in consideration towards him, and to treat him without proper respect.

It is this inner feeling, this more or less avowed partiality for a fatal defect, that we must first attack; we must conceive a lively detestation of this self-love within our hearts, and realize the evils of which it is the root.

50. Self-love is a most serious failing, whether it shows itself by vanity, by over-susceptibility, or by excessive self-absorption. It is the creature laying claim to that which is not its own, appropriating to its private use that which is due to God.

The Christian soul, the pious soul, will say faithfully and with all its heart: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost." And this wish is sincere. But why, then, instead of rendering to the most adorable Trinity all the glory that belongs to God, do they try to rob Him of a portion of it? God has said: "I will not give my glory to another" (*Gloriam meam alteri non dabo*—Isa. xlii. 8). Now, when you desire to be glorified, admired, and praised for the gifts which you have received from God, the talents with which He has endowed you, the good dispositions with which He has inspired you, the virtues which His grace has caused to be born and to increase within you, you claim the glory which is rightfully His. *Quid habes quod non accepisti?* ("What hast thou,"

says St. Paul, "that thou hast not received? And, if thou hast received it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?"—1 Cor. iv. 7). "If there be any glory connected with a rich and splendid garment," said St. Francis of Sales, "does it not belong rather to the tailor who made it than to him who wears it? Without the tailor he would be obliged to stand there in all the shame of his native nudity." And, alas! without God's gifts there would be nought in us but misery and nakedness.

But this is the very truth of which the vain man cannot be convinced, or, at any rate, it does not take hold of his mind. It is a delight to him to receive praise, to see every kind of virtue and good quality attributed to him; he considers all these eulogies as his right. "They will recognize my talent, they will be astonished at my cleverness, they will admire my judgment; they will say that I have a good heart, that I am full of devotion. They will praise my graciousness, the distinction of my manners; they will consider me extremely capable, firm and prudent. And it will all be quite true!" How many thoughts of this kind work in poor, human brains, even those of good Christians? Not that the really virtuous man acts solely with the object of winning admiration, but his intention is often not pure. People propose to do their duty, but it is not solely with the object of pleasing God; they wish also to get some credit for themselves out of the performance.

51. Well may that be termed vainglory of which vain persons are so covetous. They seek the esteem of men, an esteem which is so unstable and often so unjustly bestowed. And what real advantage accrues from other people's good or bad opinion of us? The blame of our fellows does not make us any worse, their praise does not make us better. Whether they criticize us or admire us, our actual worth remains unchanged.

Human fame has been aptly compared to a little smoke, which cannot be grasped and is quickly gone. It has

been likened also to a shadow. And what is a shadow but an empty seeming? So the esteem of men is but a misleading phantom; it appears to be something, but in reality is nothing. A shadow is uncertain and varying; sometimes much shorter, sometimes much longer than the object which it represents, so that we should be greatly out in our reckonings if we were to take the shadow into account when we wished to ascertain its dimensions. And so is the world's opinion uncertain and variable; sometimes over-favourable, sometimes too severe. Those who value their neighbours in accordance with the world's opinion of them run a great risk of being wrong in their estimates. The shadow is capricious; it flies when it is pursued; it follows those who flee from it. And so they who show themselves over-eager for glory or the esteem of their fellow-men, lose it, while those who, disclaiming such a paltry consideration, are prompted by a nobler motive, win what they have never desired.

To pursue a phantom, to seek to feed upon smoke, is not this the act of a maniac? And these vain men cannot excuse themselves by saying that they did not know the worthlessness of the world's opinion; for, like everyone else, more, perhaps, than others, in the day of their disillusioning they have lamented the injustice of human judgments. And they were not wrong, for the world is incessantly at fault. It exalts to the skies those who are deserving of anything but praise; it criticizes and censures those whom it ought to admire. Why not make light, then, of its verdicts; why not say, with St. Paul: *Mihi autem pro minimo est ut a vobis judicer* (But to me it is a very small thing to be judged by you or by man's day; but neither do I judge mine own self . . . but He that judgeth me is the Lord—1 Cor. iv. 3).

52. The evil is still worse when it leads to human respect. We do not now refer to that human respect in which cowardice is carried to the length of neglecting the essential duties of a Christian life. That is rank idolatry, the worship

of man's opinions taking the place of the worship of God. But we are speaking of that human respect which is to be found even amongst faithful souls, amongst those who ought to give an example of piety and generosity. They are willing to fulfil the necessary duties of their state ; they can do so without incurring criticism, because everyone approves of their satisfying these grave obligations. They will also pray fervently in private, but to live in the pure spirit of the Gospel, to make profession of a love of humility, of mortification and of a life of retirement, to shun superfluous conversation, to practise reserve and modesty in order that they may be the better able to live the interior life—this is to expose themselves to criticism, to risk being dubbed narrow-minded and scrupulous. They do not wish to offend lukewarm persons and to become the subject of their raillery.

53. He who, like St. Paul, rises above the judgments of men is indeed at peace. He does his duty, come what may ; he works for God only. And as God requires of him conflict and not victory, he is sure of his reward.

But he who is solicitous for his own glory, how he fears any check, how nervous he is, how he agitates and disturbs himself at the idea of any humiliation ! By these signs we know at once that his intention is not pure, his zeal not unadulterated. And want of success is his constant portion, because he who does not seek God's glory, he who puts his trust in his own strength, cannot count upon God's blessing. *Ecce homo qui non posuit Deum adjutorem suum* (Behold the man that made not God his Helper—Ps. li. 9). God abandons him to his own resources ; he fails, and failure, which is a test and a trial for the humble soul, is a chastisement for the proud. And then the real sentiments of the heart manifest themselves ; his irritation, his bad humour, his bitter recriminations are a proof of disappointed vanity, and it is evident that there was as much self-seeking as care for God's interests in his actions. How many works there are, excellent in appearance, but which

are displeasing to God, and bear little or no fruit, because they are spoiled by the too human aims of those who are responsible for them.

§ 2. *Susceptibility.*

54. The vain will have their reward here below. Our Lord has said: *Receperunt mercedem suam* (Matt. vi. 2). And the emptiness of this reward in nowise disabuses them; even when they receive their chastisement, their disappointments and vexations do not effect their cure, because self-love, the source of so much bitterness, is not cast out. We see this in those susceptible people who are perpetually making fresh troubles for themselves, and who are so very little concerned to correct their faults. Criticisms and reproofs affect them beyond measure. To be blamed in any way is a real catastrophe to them. When anyone is not quite satisfied with something that they have done, all their satisfaction evaporates, their other difficulties are forgotten, they are absorbed by the distress which this disapproval causes them. And a simple word said quite amicably, a slight warning, some advice offered with the best intentions, is often sufficient to wound them. Or a still smaller thing will sometimes suffice—some slight want of attention, some trifling neglect, a mark of indifference. At times their feelings will be hurt by something which existed in their own imagination only. They will consider themselves aggrieved when the culprit never dreamed of offending them. Would that those who are so sensitive where their own dignity is concerned might show themselves as delicate of perception in their dealings with God; as alive to anything which wounds His honour, and as careful not to injure it!

55. But their absurd susceptibility is in itself an injury to the Divine honour, both because it is contrary to humility, to truth, and justice, and also because it is a source of discord.

What could be more beautiful than that Divine charity which was so perfectly practised by the first Christians, of whom it was said that they had but one heart and one soul? What is more noble, more admirable, than that perfect union of hearts which we see in certain truly Christian circles? And why cannot this concord always exist? why, amongst souls formed for mutual understanding, should these frictions occur, these ill-disguised or sometimes openly avowed feelings of antipathy? why these bitter words, these more or less unfounded reproaches, and even at times these abusive utterances?

Inquire into the cause of these disorders, question those who exhibit so little charity towards their brethren, and you will commonly hear this reply: "But they hurt my feelings, they reproached me unjustly, they accused me falsely!" Such is the usual cause of these resentments. The man was, or thought he was, injured; and then all his self-love was up in arms. Instead of forgetting what was really quite unimportant, he goes over and over it perpetually; he reviews again in his mind all that unamiable conduct, those acts of injustice of which he fancies himself the victim; and in so doing he merely enlarges and poisons the wound. Hence proceed those feelings of aversion, those unfavourable and unjust judgments, based upon grounds the slightness of which he will not see, and from which he perhaps can never again free himself. A susceptible person does not know how to be just towards those by whom he thinks himself offended.

56. And good is also hindered thereby. In cases where some useful action might be performed, some good work co-operated in, he will not take any part or give his help. He remains given up to ill-humour; and the most important enterprises will often be rendered abortive by this stupid sulkiness. If the grievance concerns his superiors, the susceptible person will demur and will not obey cheerfully; he will breed a bad spirit amongst others by murmuring and by inciting them to indocility

or revolt. If it is against his equals, he will blacken them in their neighbours' eyes; he will not only publish the evil that he knows concerning them, but he will exaggerate their wrong actions and magnify their defects; he will not admit their good qualities, will indulge in unjust strictures with regard to them, in evil suspicions which have no serious foundation; he will prejudice against them those who would otherwise have esteemed and liked them.

§ 3. *Preoccupation with Self.*

57. Whence come these defects of vanity and susceptibility but from the too large place which *self* holds in hearts which are lacking in nobility? We think too much of self and not enough of God. This unhappy disposition often brings the best hopes to nought. A young soul shows the promise of a holy life; from the moment when it begins to give itself up to piety, grace is clearly working powerfully within it. Bursts of fervour, a great attraction towards virtue, a true generosity in sacrifice, these reveal a lively impulsion of the Holy Spirit, and augur well for the future. And then, behold! some years later, and all this beautiful fire seems to be extinguished. Instead of flying, the soul now drags itself painfully onward in the path of piety. Its virtues have not grown; its generosity has rather diminished; it is evident that God's merciful designs with regard to it are not being realized. And yet it has not been exposed to any great dangers or to a dissipating life. Spiritual aids, though perhaps less abundant than before, have not failed it.

If we ask the cause of this diminution of fervour, we shall hear complaints and find the blame thrown upon others. "I have had so much to contend with, everyone has been against me, people have slandered me, have humiliated me, persecuted me; and amidst all these troubles I received no consolation; rather, I was rebuffed, or at least

neglected." And if you press your inquiry, you will hear miserable little anecdotes, unimportant incidents which, to this poor, self-engrossed soul, have seemed really grave trials; for it sees everything that concerns itself through strong magnifying-glasses. No one comforted it, forsooth! But why did it not seek its consolation from God, the one true Comforter? But no; God is not sufficient. If you mention the example of Jesus, this does not move it; it goes on talking steadily of itself, its sorrows, the state of desolation to which it is reduced. Not that it has entirely ceased to think of God, but in the picture which is usually before its eyes He is somewhere quite far away in the background, while self occupies the foremost place.

58. Watch this person from early morning on first rising; this is the time to study the man, in order to recognize the heart's real tendencies. The heart that is enamoured of God thinks of Him from the moment when it returns to consciousness; it becomes occupied with the interests of its Well-Beloved. "My God, what shall I do for Thee this day?" Others think of their work, their projects; these cannot be called holy thoughts, and they may be detrimental to recollection, but they are not reprehensible in themselves. As for the egoistic soul, it falls back at once upon itself; it feels uneasy. "What will happen *to me* to-day? How is So-and-so going to behave *to me?* and what will some one else do to *me*—say to *me?*" It already begins to complain, for the soul engrossed in itself has many grievances. It laments about its work, as if it were the only one to labour; it complains of its annoyances, the coldness of its superiors, the indifference of its fellows, the ingratitude of those to whom it has done some service; it is not loved, supported, helped; it is not repaid for its trouble:—self, always self!

This unhappy disposition exercises its influence over the man's judgments. Why does he exalt to the skies such a person whose qualities are really quite mediocre,

and run down so unfairly another who is actually much more gifted and deserving? It is that the first is more attentive to *him*, more prepossessed in *his* favour, while the other is more reserved, and perhaps gives him umbrage. And we see him also varying in the most astonishing manner in his appreciation of the same person, according as he thinks that he has cause of complaint with regard to him or the reverse.

59. And when anyone is so self-engrossed they want others to be occupied with them also. Neither is it the good that is in them which they pour out to their hearers. God takes up His abode in the Christian heart. *Vos estis templum Dei vivi* ("You are the temple of the living God," said St. Paul—2 Cor. vi. 16). Do we respect this temple when we cast out into it the uncleanness of our self-love? And yet God is angered when His sanctuary is profaned. *Contaminare non debet sanctuarium meum* (He shall not defile My sanctuary—Lev. xxi. 23).

And the most precious temple in God's eyes is the heart of His priests. Ye profane, enter not in; it is the sanctuary of the Most High, it is the Holy of Holies. Occupy the priest's attention, then, only as long as is required in order to learn from him the way that leads to God. If you go beyond this you turn the temple of God to profane uses. You, who are nothing but an accumulation of miseries, do not detain his attention longer than need be; expose your stains to him in so far as is necessary for your purification and your future safety; then seek God, wait upon God, and at your departing, carry nothing but God away with you. Grain of dust, as you are, do not transform yourself into slime or mud. A breath, a movement, suffices to dispel the dust, while mud sticks and remains. Do not wish that God's minister should be engrossed with you; that the memory of you should remain by him. This would be to wish to usurp the place of God, who should be the object of all his thoughts and his preoccupations. Do not go to him for human inter-

course, for human consolations ; have no other design than that of obtaining an increase of light and the grace of the Sacraments by his means. Those persons who are over-engrossed in themselves profess to wish to derive a sense of security and comfort from the priest's presence ; but it is rather a secret spiritual sensuality which they are striving to satisfy. The priest belongs to God ; we should abstain from making this living and sacred treasure serve for purely natural uses.

60. And you, religious of both sexes, profane not the temple of God, which is the heart of your Superiors ; do not cause the importunate sound of your complaints, your backbitings, your murmurings, to be heard therein. Let not your voices come there to drown the voice of God, troubling the souls of your Superiors by the cares which your malice causes, and so hindering them from listening in peace to the Divine inspirations. They should only think of you when thinking of God ; the memory of you should be no obstacle to continual prayer. Come to this temple and burn the incense of your virtues, offering to God the holocaust of your tastes, your will, your judgment, your personal opinions ; but do not make of this sanctuary a profane place where all sorts of trifles are dealt with, where you come to pass the time agreeably and to satisfy your desire to talk of self. Do not seek to attract the good graces of your Superiors, to win their favour by your flatteries, by your eager and interested attentions, or strive to usurp in their hearts, which are the sanctuaries of the Divinity, a place to which you have no sort of right.

61. Finally, oh faithful souls, whatever be your estate, profane not the temple of the Lord by bringing sorrows and distractions into your brother's heart. God is there ; respect His presence. Do not pour out upon your brother the overflowings of your self-love, of your antipathies, your frivolities ; and, still more, do not touch him with the pollution of your dangerous conversation.

If you will but forget yourself, if you will but think of yourself only in thinking of God, self-love will not creep in to spoil your words; your conversation will be pure and always worthy of a Christian soul; it will distil into your brothers' hearts the sweet savour of Christ Jesus.

CHAPTER VIII

THE VIRTUE OF FAITH: ITS NATURE AND EFFECTS

Sine fide impossibile est placere Deo (Without faith it is impossible to please God).—Heb. xi. 6.

§ 1. *The Illumination of the Intellect.*

62. In the foregoing chapters we have shown the necessity of conflict. "Decline from evil," says the Holy Spirit; "repel it with all the strength of your arms. It pursues you; it clings to you; you must escape from it at all costs (*declina a malo*); but this does not suffice, you must also do the thing that is right (*et fac bonum*"—Ps. xxxvi. 27). "Do what is right, then, develop the supernatural life which I have granted unto you."

We have shown how the human creature is transfigured by the supernatural, which gives it a wonderful likeness to God. And the foundation of the supernatural order within us is faith. If we would learn how to cultivate this fundamental virtue, it will not be superfluous to begin by studying it carefully, analyzing the elements of which the act of faith is composed, and seeing what are the respective parts played by God and by the creature in the production of acts of this virtue, this first link whereby God and the faithful soul are united.

63. In order to make a supernatural act of faith—and it is the same with the other virtues—it is necessary that God should *operate upon the intellect, that He should render it, in a manner, divine, giving it the power to see truths of the supernatural order in a new light.* It is possible to believe that God exists, without possessing faith; for the

unaided light of reason demonstrates His existence. There is no need of supernatural assistance in order to conclude the existence of the watchmaker from the evidence of the existence of the watch ; we do not require grace before we conclude the Creator from the creature. "The devils also believe and tremble," says St. James (St. Jas. ii. 19) ; but their faith has nothing supernatural about it. Luther gave up his faith, but he still believed in Our Lord's Divinity, in His presence in the Holy Eucharist, the simple light of reason sufficing to demonstrate to him the truth of these dogmas.

But in the simple and docile heart of the true Christian the operation of grace precedes the exercise of reason ; this Divine grace takes possession of the soul's faculties, enabling them to do after a Divine fashion that which they could otherwise only have accomplished in a human fashion. There is an immense, although an insensible, difference, then, between the obstinate heretic's belief in God and the act of faith in God on the part of one of the faithful.

§ 2. *The Will's Part in the Act of Faith.*

64. In order to make us produce the act of faith, God is not satisfied to operate upon the intellect, and to endow it with a superhuman strength ; *He acts simultaneously upon the will, communicating to it an altogether Divine love of the truths proposed.* This action of God upon the will is at once powerful and delicate. He incites it without compelling it ; He inclines it, but without constraining it ; the soul remains free ; it can harden itself, it can refuse to love or even to accept these truths, however certain and undeniable they may be. It is this liberty of the will either to accept or to refuse these revealed truths which constitutes the merit of the act of faith.

Let no one be astonished at this, or fancy that conviction is solely a matter of reason and not of free choice. It is not with regard to the truths of religion only, but with many other incontestable things also, that the human

soul can refuse its assent. The will can impose its decisions upon the mind, and we often see the heart leading the head astray. How many persons come to believe what they wish to believe, to doubt what they wish to doubt! Why do people so seldom arrive at any understanding in their discussions, but that self-love will not allow itself to be convinced? Let the most evident facts be inconvenient or compromising; let them appear to be detrimental to the interests which we are supporting, the cause which we are defending; let them be against a friend or in favour of an adversary, and they will be accepted with difficulty, or, it may be, obstinately rejected. The evidence will be doubted, some improbability made the most of, some difficulty exaggerated; in a word, if truth is displeasing, a hundred objections will be found, there will be fifty excellent reasons for not admitting it; such is the influence which the will exercises over the intellect.

The part which the will plays in the act of faith is easily understood, therefore. The truths presented to us are sure; it is easy to feel certainty with regard to them. God Himself acts upon the soul in order to assist it to form an unshakable conviction. If the soul is sincere and upright, if the will is good and just, faith will germinate, will strengthen and develop. But it may be quite otherwise; the will may be rebellious; the soul to whom these truths of religion are proposed, finding them irksome, may conceive a sinful aversion for them. And then, despite the evidence of facts, despite the certainty of the proofs, despite the strongest impulses of grace, the man may resist. He has the power to evade God's action; he can wilfully turn his attention away from the proofs; he can attach himself obstinately to the objections, refuse to listen to the solutions, and *make himself* incredulous. However brilliant be the sun's rays, it is always possible to intercept its beams and to live in the dark.

Why, asks St. Augustine, did the Jews, the witnesses of the Divine virtues of Jesus Christ and of His innumer-

able miracles, remain in such great numbers in unbelief? And the holy Bishop replies: "*Non credebant quia nolebant*" (They did not believe because they would not).

Faith, therefore, requires first of all that man's heart should not be rebellious: it also calls for an act of good-will, of loving submission to the Divine teaching. God has Himself deigned to make known to men the truths which He came into the world to teach. He willed that they should be proposed early to our souls; He acts by His grace upon our minds and upon our hearts in order to make us adhere to these truths. To remain indifferent would be to resist the intimate action of grace, to scorn God's advances, to despise the great gift of revelation, and grossly to insult God.

He who believes, therefore, has had a right will; he has freely loved the proposed truth; he has chosen to accept God's teaching. If he has done this with all his heart, his merit is so much the greater; and if, in order to accomplish this act, he has been obliged to bow his intellect before mysteries which he does not understand, his merit is greater still.

§ 3. *The Faith of the Unbaptized and the Faith of the Christian.*

65. This last perfection of faith is only imposed upon those souls to whom the Christian mysteries have been clearly proposed; and this is not so with those to whom these dogmas have not been taught, or who, not having learnt to know and love them from infancy, see their justice and truth with difficulty; for the influence of prejudice and early education is very strong. These souls, however, cannot be saved without faith; they must at least believe, and with a supernatural faith, "that He is, and is a rewarder of them that seek Him" (Heb. xi. 6).

And this faith is possible for them. God, who desires the salvation of all men, will give them the light of grace,

by which they may make this indispensable act and practise supernaturally those virtues the necessity of which they are able to understand. Compared with our own, the condition of the heathen, of Mohammedans, is certainly miserable; they are poor compared with our wealth. And yet how wonderful is the spectacle of an unbaptized soul obeying the illuminations of grace, overcoming its passions, governing its appetites, regulating its powers, never consenting to any actions but such as are legitimate and right. Although the Divine light is much less abundant than in the case of the faithful Christian, the unbaptized soul receives a sufficiency (provided that it opposes no obstacle to the action of the Holy Spirit) which makes it a delight to the Angels and the elect.

66. But what must be said of those whom Holy Baptism has rooted in the supernatural, and united to God by such strong bands? *In caritate radicati et fundati* (Being rooted and grounded in charity — Eph. iii. 17). Even before their minds could expand to the light of reason and of grace, the germs of faith were already deposited in their souls. As the holy waters of Baptism ran down upon their foreheads, God accomplished within them a marvellous work; He fashioned in them a believing *heart and mind;* He implanted a supernatural aptitude for laying hold of Divine truths, and a holy disposition to their acceptance, so that when the Christian dogmas are proposed to them, their act of faith is easy.

This faith which God gives to His children is a strong faith; the soul is thereby powerfully inclined to believe the word of God; the human will, taken captive by grace, is fully disposed lovingly to accept the Divine teachings. This faith which comes from God is a firm faith; by its aid the soul will unhesitatingly believe the truths of religion; the deepest mysteries will not appal it; nothing will shake it; neither the most deplorable scandals nor the most specious objections, the most insidious arguments of unbelievers, nor the most terrible Satanic temptations.

This faith, planted by God in the human heart, is ineradicable from without ; the man himself can alone tear it out of his bosom and cast it from him. And to do this, a culpable, a gravely culpable act against faith is required, such as some voluntary and deliberate doubt which is a real offence against God's honour, or else a wicked pleasure in seeing the Divine teaching controverted and denied. But faith can repel all these external assaults. And (what is still more marvellous, and is, indeed, the fruit of God's infinite mercy) the gravest sins against the other virtues, revolts, blasphemies, voluptuousness, scandals, do not extinguish this fundamental virtue in the guilty soul ; this foundation of the supernatural order remains in the sinner, so that he may still be able to reconstruct the entire edifice. Nothing can destroy it, then, saving the free act of the Christian soul—a freedom which God's gifts always respect.

67. *Gratias Deo super inenarrabili dono ejus* (Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift—2 Cor. ix. 15), and this, Christian souls, is not the only grace which you have received in Baptism. Understand, then, what a favour God has vouchsafed to you in thus marking you from your first entry into life with the sign of your regeneration.

By Baptism we are closely and strongly united to God ; this Sacrament establishes a kind of communication between us and God which nothing can destroy. It is, if we may be permitted to employ a rude simile, like a mysterious duct which, coming from God, is united to the superior portion of the soul. By this channel the luminous and operating grace passes from the Divinity to us, it brings a real participation in the Divine attributes, in the Divine wisdom and strength, making us able to produce works which are wholly to the glory of God.

68. Mortal sin can obstruct this channel, it is true, but it does not sever it. The Divine light enters no longer, but the obstacle is not so solid that a vague glimmer does not still find its way through ; and this suffices to reveal to the sinner all the hideous impurities which fill his unhappy

soul. And while thus enlightening it, God continues to act upon this guilty soul. If He can no longer come in unto it, as in the case of the just soul, and operate upon it with all His attributes, His holiness, His goodness, and His tenderness, His justice is still untrammelled ; it shakes the sinner and overwhelms him with remorse, it sounds in his ears like thunder, striking terror into his heart. It is true that some sinners become more and more hardened, and finish by ignoring the Divine warnings completely, but this wilful deafness supposes a quite abnormal abuse of grace.

69. In the just soul the Divine light will always find entrance ; it is the Devil whose ingress is barred. He is active externally, and is often able to make a considerable disturbance by the temptations which he suggests and the troubles which he causes ; but inwardly the kingdom of grace continues undisturbed. This grace, which is of God, tends to deify the whole soul, transfiguring even the low and the carnal ; the grossest of the human senses, that which is most inclined to follow its animal instincts, may, under the purifying and sanctifying action of grace, become the source of acts which are of eternal worth ; it can bring forth, by faith and in faith, holy works, all empurpled with the Blood of Jesus, precious seeds of celestial glory.

But while grace is striving to fulfil its mission, the Devil finds an accomplice within us. This accomplice is Nature, all the tendencies of which are in opposition to the holy inclinations instilled into us by grace. Nature, encouraged, excited by the infernal adversary, cries incessantly, " For self !" while grace answers, " For God, and down with self !"—contrary watchwords, neither of which drowns the other, so that the sounds clash together in our ears. It is the hot conflict, waged between Nature and grace. Which will bear away the victory ? The answer rests with us. But we are the more constrained to listen to the voice of grace, as we are the more deeply indebted to Him who has shown Himself so liberal towards us.

CHAPTER IX

THE LIFE OF FAITH

Justus ex fide vivit (The just man liveth by faith).—GAL. iii. 11.

§ 1. *The Various Degrees of the Virtue of Faith.*

70. WE must be attentive to the voice of grace; that is to say, we must obey the motives which faith inspires in us. Herein lies our salvation, and the more docile we are to the lessons of faith, the holier will our lives be, and the more pleasing to God.

God has made the first advances to us; but in order that we may have the opportunity of acquiring merit, He leaves us free to respond to them; He has given us the precious seed of faith; but He has also chosen to leave to us the task of cultivating it, of producing from it a vigorous tree which shall attain to its full proportions. Pilgrims travelling towards our native land (in the beautiful language of the theologians), we receive a lamp, like the virgins of the Gospel, to light us upon our way. But this lamp will give out either a feeble light, or one of dazzling brilliancy, according to the care that we bestow upon it.

How many Christians are there who think of the teachings of their religion at long intervals only! The majority of the actions of their lives are inspired by wise motives, but it is a purely human wisdom. Deep down in their souls there is a general disposition not to offend God, and to accomplish their own salvation. This may suffice to give their actions an habitual tendency towards their supernatural end and to make them meritorious; but

how small is the merit, how feeble the influence of religion upon their lives !

They devote themselves to some work, less from motives of faith than from taste, or because their reason shows them its necessity ; such satisfactions as they can procure without any stings of conscience they allow themselves and seek after, while many of their actions have no other end than that of satisfying their nature. Their faith is not sufficiently strong to give a holy direction to all their conduct ; the lights that they receive are not brilliant ; they rather confirm than go beyond the truths which unaided reason can apprehend. We cannot say of these Christians that they live by faith.

And even amongst pious souls there are very many whose lives are not wholly ruled by faith. Although this virtue exercises a great influence upon their conduct, many of their actions are still inspired, or partly so, at any rate, by human and selfish motives. The thought of self mingles all too frequently with the thought of God, and hinders them from being powerfully affected by the sight of His grandeur, His holiness, and His love.

71. To live by faith is to direct every act, and not some amongst them only, towards a supernatural end ; it is to live for God. It is also to live by God ; for it is to feed the mind assiduously with the thought of the Divine perfections ; it is to vivify the will by an entire and continual adherence to the Divine will. And for this there is needed, not a feeble and half-hearted faith, no, not even an ordinary faith, but one which is powerful and intense, communicating to the soul an illumination far surpassing the feeble light of reason. And the life of faith is a mysterious one ; those that live any other life are incapable of understanding it. The operation of the grace that produces it is mysterious ; the truths by which the soul is nourished and illumined are full of mystery ; and full of mystery, above all, is this thought of God which dominates the life of the man of faith. God is to him an unfathomable, incomprehensible

Being, and the more his conception of God becomes elevated and perfected, the deeper appears the mystery which confronts him. But at the same time that he becomes familiarized with these mysterious deeps, he perceives that all else, everything which is within the bounds of his intelligence, is superficial and of little worth ; he understands that God *is* everything, that God alone sees everything, that God alone is wise, and that, compared with the Divine wisdom, our pretended wisdom is but pure foolishness.

But in order to arrive at this exalted degree of faith, it is necessary to renounce all human methods of thought. We must abase the pride of the intellect ; accept, without understanding them, the Divine designs ; give unreservedly to God all that He requires of us ; let ourselves be led blindfold by His Providence, going, should He ask it of us, even as far as to the performance of acts of truly heroic virtue.

§ 2. *The Effects of a Lively Faith.*

72. When God desired to attach Abraham to Himself, He said to him : " Go forth out of thy country and from thy kindred, and out of thy father's house, and come into the land which I shall show thee " (Gen. xii. 1). Abraham appears to have been brought already to a perfect fulfilment of the natural law ; he performed the ordinary duties of life faithfully, and for these he had no need of any higher light ; reason, illumined by grace, was sufficient to show him what was good, honest, and just ; it also sufficed to show him that God recompensed the good and punished the wicked, bestowing His benefits upon the children of men, and having a right to their gratitude and their love. This certainly was faith, but it was faith treading in the footprints of reason, not faith rising above and beyond the gifts of intellect, and soaring unto the unfathomable splendours of the Divinity.

And then God called Abraham to a higher state of virtue. He required of him heroic acts of generosity and faith,

He put him to tests which upset all the theories of human wisdom. Magnificent, doubtless, were the promises which He made to him ; but before Abraham could merit their fulfilment he had to tread many mysterious ways—ways of anguish and uncertainty, ways of a blind obedience. He did not attempt to resist God ; he did not argue ; he merely said to himself that God is the Holy One, wise, powerful, and good. His submission was perfect, and it won him an abundance of light ; and so lively did his faith become that he merited the title of Father of the Faithful.

73. Abraham is a figure of the perfect Christian. He, too, must rise up and come out of his own land (the regions of sense and of pure reason, that is to say), to go forward into a higher world ; he must renounce his own guiding lights in order to obtain those which are Divine. God says to him, as He said to the Father of the Faithful : " Depart out of these low-lying paths of human reason ; climb higher ; go up even to the place in which I Myself dwell ; there will I speak unto thee, there will I teach thee. Hitherto thou hast lived uprightly, wisely, applauded of men ; henceforth thou shalt walk before Me, in the light of My brightness, and thy life shall be perfected. Go up to the higher, to the nobler part of thy being, and from thence, divinely illumined, reign thou over thy senses, direct thy life, and show thyself the true child of light."

And whence comes this light to us ? It proceeds from God—God who dwells within us, and who causes His pure rays to shine in us ; it proceeds from God, and reveals Him to us—God the mysterious, the incomprehensible, God the all-admirable, the all-adorable Being, before whom we have but to prostrate ourselves and to keep silence.

O holy light, which we derive from faith, high illumination, dower of God's true friends, how far art thou from being appreciated as thou dost deserve ! All too few are those that receive thee, who seek after thy brightness, who follow the paths which are lit up by thy beams. Precious light,

incomprehensible as the Divinity whence thou dost emanate, no created mind can contain thee, no human genius perfectly understand thee! All that thou dost illumine seems to be of unfathomable depth; one word from God, made plain to us by thee, contains more treasures than the human mind can receive; and those who search into it by thy rays confess that they catch but faint glimpses of all the wealth that it signifies. When thou showest us supernatural virtues they seem beautiful, great, boundless, and we see, too, the littleness of him who possesses them; each one manifests itself to us in numberless degrees; we might progress from day to day for long years together without attaining them in their fulness. He whom thou dost illumine then understands his poverty and groans over his great misery. Thou revealest all the faults also which defile the soul; by thy light are seen those stains the existence of which imperfect souls do not even suspect, those mountains of imperfections which escape the ordinary Christian's notice!

These are not false imaginings, such as those of the scrupulous, who see wrong where none exists, and when it is present often fail to perceive it; for their judgment is perverted, and unless they correct it they cannot receive the fulness of light; their humility is without depth, and is often only a false humility, which diminishes faith in God, if it does not stifle it.[1] The man of faith, on the contrary, sees things as they are, being enlightened by God Himself,

[1] Great is their error who imagine that scruples are a sign of ardent faith. Faith clings only to the truth; the greater the truth the more perfect is the resulting idea of the Divine perfections. The scrupulous—those of them, at least, who do not conquer their over-scrupulousness—have, on the contrary, a very wrong idea of God's justice, which they fancy is irritated by involuntary failings. They have little faith in the goodness, the love, of Jesus; the false beliefs with which they feed their minds are injurious to God's honour. Their hope, too, is as lukewarm as their faith. Small, also, is their charity, for, occupied incessantly with themselves, always engrossed with the thought of their own faults, they make very few acts of love, and this love is devoid of energy, since it is very often insufficient to overcome their fears and make them perform their duty.

who has but to reveal the truth to him in order to give him true humility.

Men of great faith have a sovereign respect for God. They form a very lofty idea of His greatness, His power, His wisdom, His holiness, His infinite goodness ; they also have a very exalted and right conception of the perfections of the soul of Jesus, of the love of His Divine Heart, of the tenderness, the purity, the holiness of Mary. What distant and mysterious horizons of the spiritual world reveal themselves to the eyes of the true friends of God ! To what depths does their vision penetrate ! What they see, what they feel, they cannot express, for there are thoughts and sentiments which human language is unable to translate. And so also they are powerless to explain their realization of the nothingness of the creature, the hideousness of sin, and the stains caused by the least imperfection in the soul.

CHAPTER X

HOW TO OBTAIN A PERFECT FAITH : HUMILITY AND SPIRITUAL READING

Credo, Domine ; adjuva incredulitatem meam (I do believe, Lord ; help my unbelief).—ST. MARK ix. 23.

§ 1. *How Progress in Faith is favoured by Humility.*

74. To whom, then, is this precious light of faith granted ? Who are those truly just men who live by this perfect faith ? and what must we do to obtain it ?

The first condition for receiving an increase of faith from God is humility. Faith never exacts an unreasonable act from the believer ; its teachings are never in opposition to facts. But if its mysteries are not contrary to reason, they go beyond reason, and humble it. That one Divine Nature should be possessed by three distinct Persons is neither possible nor impossible to reason ; reason has nothing to say either for or against it ; and since God has declared it to be so, reason can but submit. And this applies not only to great dogmas, but to many other truths —all of those, in fact, which faith illumines ; for faith can project its rays equally upon God's works and upon the events in which His Providence supervenes. Those upright and humble souls who can see God in everything, who recognize His hand in their greatest afflictions, who in circumstances most disturbing to human wisdom bow down and adore, practise the virtue of faith in an eminent degree, and in return receive great light ; while the proud who think only of themselves, who carry reason to excess, who want to account for everything, to pronounce judgment

upon everything, who are loath to admit that their intelligence is limited and that their wisdom cannot comprehend God's ways, receive but little illumination from Him. At times, too, pride of intellect leads to revolts in which faith makes shipwreck, for it is nothing but foolishness and insolent audacity to desire to understand and measure God.

Too often, in fact, we forget God's limitless greatness, the infinitude of His wisdom, the inscrutable depth of His knowledge and the extreme smallness of our human minds. We treat God as One who, while surpassing us, still resembles us, and with whom we can argue and dispute. But "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are My ways exalted above your ways, and My thoughts above your thoughts" (Isa. lv. 8, 9). To understand the Divine intentions, to grasp the designs or the judgments of God—as well might we attempt to touch the vault of Heaven with our feeble hands and to lay hold of the stars.

This is what those Christians forget who seem ready to call God to account for the manner in which He governs the world, and are astounded and scandalized, or make a profession of scepticism, when they are confronted with events which they, by their poor human judgment, cannot understand; who, when confronted with the recital of some marvellous intervention of God, instead of inquiring soberly and impartially whether the proofs are satisfactory, are immediately contemptuous and incredulous, reluctant to allow God the right to show forth His power, and rejecting as far as possible all explanations which are not purely natural. "*I* do not see why God should have worked this prodigy on this occasion, and therefore He did not do it!" "The least possible amount of the supernatural for us!" This seems to be their motto; and they apply it not only to present events and to the Church's history, but to Holy Scripture itself. So, too, the very idea of Providence is obscured by them; occupied as they are in accounting for

everything that takes place by purely human causes, the events which are unrolled before their eyes do not make them think of God ; their attention is riveted upon man, his qualities, his defects, his skill, his awkwardness, his intrigues, some auspicious or vexatious circumstance ; and they see nothing beyond. They do not understand that these secondary causes are instruments in the hand of the God who governs the universe. These dispositions, as it is easy to see, are obstacles to the growth of faith, and the words of Holy Scripture, " The just man liveth by faith " (Rom. i. 17) cannot certainly be applied to them.

75. Why do so many Christians find it so hard to resign themselves to the trials of life ? Because they want to reason about them, instead of blindly accepting the Divine Will. They will not remember the great principle that because God is infinitely wise and we are essentially limited, we must not dispute with Him, but adore the ways of Providence, and allow ourselves to be led onwards in the paths which He has chosen for us. In such persons as these faith will continue weak and languishing.

And amongst other trials there is one through which all souls must pass if God desires to lead them to perfect faith ; and this is the disappearance of sensible graces, with dryness and interior suffering. Many souls during this painful but salutary crisis do not know how to bow their judgment and their will before the decrees of the Divine wisdom ; they know neither how to resign themselves, nor how to enter upon the path to which God is calling them. But when we humbly submit our reason, light comes to us ; we realize that true faith, pure faith, is obscure, insensible ; that it is necessary to abide patiently, seeing nothing, feeling nothing, understanding nothing, and that those who always wish to find savour and sensible sweetness in God's service become blinded and deprive themselves of the pure light of faith.

The soul understands this when it has humbled its intellect before the Divine wisdom. Then, having made

the best possible use of this great gift of faith, it receives a new supply, and little by little to meditate upon the attributes of God becomes easier; it learns to know them better and to delight in them more. Is it not our duty to direct our feeble gaze as much as may be towards this great, this infinite Being, the worthy object of all our thoughts, our memory, our admiration, and our love? And we ought to find our supreme happiness in the reflection that He is so great that we can never do more than catch a glimpse of the least part of His perfections, that He alone can know, admire, and glorify Himself in accordance with His merits.

§ 2. *Spiritual Reading.*

76. But where shall we find the first rules for the knowledge of God? To think of Him is good; but is there not some teacher who will speak to us of God, whose lessons we can ponder, and so assist our minds to ascend to Him and contemplate His ineffable beauty?

God Himself has revealed Himself to man; He has spoken; His Word is the sustaining bread which should preserve the life of faith in our souls. The doctrines which He came to bring into the world, the maxims of His Gospel, the lessons which He has enclosed within that Book which He has inspired, the teachings which He transmits to us by His Church, whether in the liturgy, the writings of theologians, the sermons of His preachers, or in the counsels which the Saints, filled as they are with His spirit, have given us; such is the sacred food which He offers to our souls. The more we feed upon it, the sweeter it grows to our taste, and for him who receives it, purely, humbly, and frequently, it becomes a strengthening and a ravishing feast.

Lex Domini immaculata convertens animas (The law of the Lord is unspotted, converting souls; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing hearts; the commandment of the Lord is lightsome, enlightening the eyes. More to be

desired than gold and many precious stones, and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb—Ps. xviii. 8, 9, 11).

And is it the word of the law only which the Prophet King wishes to extol thus? No, certainly; but in this law (which was the draft of the law of the Gospel) he found the Word of God, the Divine doctrine. And the truths thus revealed to him filled him with admiration. This is why he studied, searched into the book of the law, pored over the words, examined into the motives, deduced their consequences. Thus it was that he discovered deep truths, that the wisdom of God revealed itself unto him. And he then applied all these things to his own life, comparing his actions with the precepts of this holy law, throwing the searchlight of the Divine teaching upon his conduct, and thereby finding material for the most excellent rules of life.

And this study of the sacred books taught him to know God better; he formed an even higher and therefore a more accurate idea of God's grandeur; he was ravished at beholding Him so condescending to man—to man, whose misery and nothingness he had now learnt to understand better. Hence those cries of admiration and praise which escape him, in spite of himself and upon all occasions. *Domine, Dominus noster, quam admirabile est nomen tuum in universa terra!* (O Lord, our Lord, how admirable is Thy Name in all the earth!—Ps. viii. 10). "What is man that Thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that Thou visitest him?" (Ps. viii. 5). The Saints of the New Testament, like those of the old order, have studied these writings and found abundant light therein. Every book which makes God known, vivifies and augments faith, illumines the mind, and warms the heart; but more than any others do those inspired Books in which God's part is so large a one, sustain and nourish them who read them reverently. "All Scripture, inspired of God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice, that the man of God may be perfect, furnished to every good work" (2 Tim. iii. 16, 17).

Those who in a time of scarcity are driven to eat bread

in which there is an admixture of chaff, are barely kept alive; and so those who, instead of nourishing their souls on pure and wholesome literature, read only frivolous books and trashy newspapers, soon feel the effects of this pernicious diet; their faith languishes and presently withers away. So, too, those who, without entirely excluding pious reading, give it too small a share of their time, and occupy themselves overmuch with profane books and useless pursuits which are merely intended to fill up their days, can never attain to the perfection of the spirit of faith.

§ 3. *The Sacred Liturgy, the Source of Light and Love.*

77. Next to Holy Scripture, we have pointed to the sacred Liturgy as a subject for study and an aid to faith. It is, indeed, a source of light and vivifying warmth which is within the reach of every soul, and it is one for which all should feel a natural inclination. Every soul is a child of the Church; and the Holy Spirit, who animates and directs this beloved Spouse of Christ, dwells also by grace as a most sweet guest in the hearts of all Christians, whose every movement He desires to direct. What are the ineffable groanings which He often utters within us but His urgent invitations to us to live the life of His Church, to pray with her, to permeate ourselves with her spirit? Happy the soul that responds to this invitation, for it then offers, in union with the Church of Christ, the prayer which is most dear to the ear and the Heart of God—the prayer which is consequently the most powerful. It slakes its thirst, not at a private, a human fountain, but at that great river which rejoices the City of God, that source wherein the spirit of prayer abides. What knowledge of God and of the mysteries of our holy religion does not the liturgical life procure for the soul? And here we cannot do better than listen to one who, after labouring and striving in order to bring about the adoption of the Roman Liturgy in France, has interpreted it with so much knowledge and affection.

"For what is the Liturgy but an untiring affirmation of

the works of God? A solemn acknowledgment of those Divine facts which, though done but once, are imperishable in man's remembrance, and are every year renewed by the commemoration he makes of them.

"It is the Divine cycle, in which appear all the works of God, each in its turn: the Seven Days of the Creation; the Pasch and Pentecost of the Jewish People; the ineffable visit of the Incarnate Word; His Sacrifice and His Victory; the Descent of the Holy Ghost; the Holy Eucharist; the surpassing glories of the Mother of God, ever a Virgin; the magnificence of the Angels; the merits and triumphs of the Saints. . . . There is not a single point of Christian doctrine which in the course of the Liturgical Year is not brought forward—nay, which is not inculcated with that authority and unction wherewith our Holy Mother the Church has so deeply impregnated her words and her eloquent rites. The faith of the believer is thus enlightened more and more each year; the theological *sensus* is formed in him; prayer leads him to science. Mysteries continue to be mysteries, but their brightness becomes so vivid that the mind and heart are enchanted, and we begin to imagine what a joy the eternal sight of these Divine beauties will produce in us, when the glimpse of them through the cloud is such a charm to us.

"Hence we find that for upwards of a thousand years the Church, who prays in her temples seven times a day, and once again during the night, did not pray alone. The people kept her company, and fed themselves with delight on the manna which is hidden under the words and mysteries of the Divine Liturgy. Thus initiated into the sacred cycle of the mysteries of the Christian Year, the faithful, attentive to the teachings of the Spirit, came to know the secrets of eternal life; and without any further preparation a Christian was not infrequently chosen by the Bishops to be a priest, or even a Bishop, that he might go and pour out on the people the treasures of wisdom and love which he had drunk in at the very fountain-head.

"Yes, there must needs be great progress in a Christian soul when the object of her faith is ever gaining greater light; when the hope of her salvation is almost forced upon her by the sight of all those wonders which God's goodness has wrought for His creatures; and when charity is enkindled within her under the breath of the Holy Ghost, who has made the Liturgy to be the centre of His working in men's souls. Is not the formation of Christ within us (Gal. iv. 19) the result of our uniting in His various mysteries, the *joyful*, the *sorrowful*, and the *glorious?*

"These mysteries of Jesus come into us, are incorporated into us, each year, by the power of the special grace which the Liturgy produces by communicating them to us; and the new man gradually grows up, even on the ruins of the old. Then, again, in order that the Divine type may the more easily be stamped upon us, we need examples; we want to see how our fellow-men have realized that type in themselves; and the Liturgy does this for us, by offering us the practical teaching and the encouragement of our dear Saints who shine like stars in the firmament of the Ecclesiastical Year. By dint of looking upon them, we come to learn the way which leads to Jesus, just as Jesus is our Way which leads to the Father. . . .

"Let not, then, the soul, the Bride of Christ, that is possessed with a love of prayer, be afraid that her thirst cannot be quenched by these rich streams of the Liturgy, which now flow calmly as a streamlet, now roll with the loud impetuosity of a torrent, and now swell with the mighty heavings of the sea. Let her come and drink this clear water which *springeth up to life everlasting* (St. John iv. 14), for this water flows from the very *fountains of her Saviour* (Isa. xii. 3); and the Spirit of God animates it by His virtue, rendering it sweet and refreshing to the *panting stag* (Ps. xli. 2)."[1]

[1] *Liturgical Year*, General Preface, vol. i. Right Rev. Dom Prosper Guéranger. Translated by the Rev. Dom Laurence Shepherd.

CHAPTER XI

THE GROWTH OF FAITH BY MEANS OF A PROPER REGULATION OF THE SOUL'S POWERS

Dixerunt Apostoli Domino : adauge nobis fidem (And the Apostles said to the Lord, Increase our faith).—St. Luke xvii. 5.

§ 1. *Of the Account that we shall have to render to God for the Use of our Faculties.*

78. God has spoken ; and we know where to find His words ; once in possession of His doctrine, how ought we to profit by it ? Enriched by the precious gift of faith, how should we make it fructify ? What should the soul do ? What faculties should we bring into play in order that our acts of faith should go on multiplying and continually progressing to perfection ?

The Divine light finds its way in through the intellect ; it enters at the soul's summit, and disperses itself thence through the lower faculties. But these lower powers must dispose themselves for the reception of the light by emptying themselves as far as possible of profane things and filling themselves with those that are holy. The harmony will thus be perfect, and the Divine light, instead of being repulsed by irreconcilable enemies, will be drawn into every corner of the soul, and will penetrate it throughout, purifying and embellishing it. *Quis potest facere mundum de immundo ?* (Job. xiv. 4). "Who can make him clean who is unclean ?" says the Patriarch. Only God. By pouring the purifying light of faith into the human soul He communicates a purity and a holiness like to His own infinite purity and holiness.

79. The first thing, therefore, is not to oppose any obstacle to this fruitful action of God ; we must so regulate and govern the faculties of the soul as to permit and favour the operations of grace.

How many, alas ! fail in this duty ! " Lord, Thou didst deliver to me five talents ; behold, I have gained other five over and above " (Matt. xxv. 20), the good and faithful servant will say. The talents which God entrusts to us are, above all, says St. Gregory, the faculties of our souls ; if we fail to turn them to any account, we shall be condemned like the faithless servant of the parable.

These faculties cannot remain inactive ; they will, of necessity, bring forth works either unto salvation or unto perdition. If they produce works unto salvation, fruits of love, they will have their just reward, and each one of them will receive his hire. Magnificent sights, exquisite harmonies, sweet perfumes, pure caresses, or, to speak more accurately, spiritual joys corresponding to these various sensations, will be the recompense to modesty of the eyes and the custody of the senses. The mind that lived on the thought of God here below will be ravished by the wonderful knowledge of the Divinity which shall be granted to it ; the will that loved God will find a measure of felicity in exact proportion to that which it possessed on earth, and will rejoice in it for all eternity.

80. And God will reward us with no less justice than goodness, and His chastisements will be terrible because they will be just. Illicit looks, obscene songs, wrong conversations, impure acts, will all have their fit punishment hereafter ; sins of thought will be avenged through the medium of the faculty which has offended. But the intellect and the will, those two master-faculties, will be the principal source of the torments of the damned. As we have to take these two faculties into account in order to understand in what the essential happiness of the elect consists (a happiness which will be made up of knowledge and of love), it is also necessary to take into account the

intellect and the will in Hell if we would understand the essential torment of the lost—a torment which will be greater in proportion to the sinner's guilt.

Because he has rejected the light, therefore will the light pursue and torture him. Here on earth the light of the sun rejoices the healthy eye, but is a source of suffering to the sick ; so in the other world a more resplendent radiance will rejoice the eyes of the elect and will be the source of punishment to the damned. In the hour of the great revolt, the most highly dowered, intellectually, amongst the rebellious Angels were the most guilty, and in Hell their gifts will continue to endure for their more abundant torment and grief. They, better than their fellows, will understand what eternity is. Their vision will penetrate farther into the interminable cycle of ages during which their torments will know no end. Better, too, than their fellows they will realize the immensity and the worth of the good which they have forfeited and the full extent of their misery. And thus, in proportion as the soul received the Divine mercy here below, will the damned be penetrated by the Divine justice ; and as the mind abused the light that was vouchsafed to it, so shall it be tortured by the avenging radiance which shall penetrate it, in spite of itself.

The will rejected God and attached itself to sin ; and the measure of this sin shall be its chastisement. As it followed after illicit and vain delights, so must it now follow in vain after the supreme good which will be denied to it for evermore. Even as it once thirsted after and desired sinful pleasures, so now it thirsts after the joys which it has lost eternally ; and ever proportionately greater is its perpetually baulked desire, its endless torment.

And from its unappeased hatred another source of torment to the will then proceeds. Its whole nature being perverted, the faculty of love has become the faculty of hate—hatred for God, hatred for all that is good, hatred also for its companions in misfortune ; the unhappy wretch can no longer do anything but hate ; his hate will be proportionate to his

malice, proportionate to the sins with which he has stained his soul. As satisfied love will be the joy of the elect, so the unsatiated hatred of the lost will be their torment.

The lost soul delighted formerly in himself, in the strength of his own intellect, in the force of his own will; now he sees himself in all his frightful hideousness; he sees these faculties of which he was once so proud, deformed and perverted—the mind desiring error, writhing before the truth; the will hating the good and pursuing after the evil. He can no longer take any satisfaction in himself; he loathes himself, and would fain conceal himself even from his own eyes.

81. But it is not only the lost who will find the source of their suffering in the talents which they have received, in the powers of their souls which they have abused. The holy souls also, in the payment of their debt to the Divine justice, will be punished as they have sinned; but these souls, whom God so loves, will find the alleviation of their griefs in those other faculties which they have used aright. Those who have loved to dwell in thought upon the things pertaining to faith, to submit their will to the Divine good pleasure, will receive consolations in the light which shows them more clearly God's justice and goodness, and in their more ardent love for the decrees of His wisdom.[1]

[1] Writers upon the subject of Purgatory, after treating of its terrible sufferings, speak of the joy which these souls feel there. The thought that their salvation is assured comforts them; their desire to expiate their faults makes their sufferings more endurable. But it seems to us that it is not possible to declare of all indiscriminately that they experience this lively joy. Those who have lived for themselves, or in the pursuit of earthly pleasures, who have been guilty of great abuses of grace, must be a prey to bitter regrets, which, at least in the early days of their detention in this place of expiation, would prevent their experiencing this happiness. Those, on the other hand, who have loved sacrifice, and who, upon earth, found their satisfaction in spending themselves for God's glory, who have longed for Heaven—they, while regretting their light faults, are happy because they see the day of recompense drawing near—happy, above all, to satisfy the Divine Justice—and their joy may be greatly in excess of their sorrow.

It is of the first importance, therefore, that a Christian should make a holy use of the faculties of his soul, because if he employs them aright they will be to him a precious treasure, and if ill he will be called to a strict account for their misuse.

§ 2. *The Subordination of the Soul's Various Powers.*

82. With what a magnificent gift has God dowered us in thus equipping us with faculties which assist each other, complete each other, and enable us to accomplish such beautiful actions! Amongst them we perceive gradation and subordination, the less noble being the servants of the higher. The exterior senses are, as it were, the purveyors to the interior senses; the imagination is nourished by the sights upon which the eyes have dwelt; the memory is stored with the sounds which the ears have heard. The various objects perceived by the exterior senses, being recalled by the interior, appeal to the will, causing the birth within it of attractions and desires; the intelligence then judges and appraises, and the will finally pronounces the decision. But if the will is the last to take action, it regulates the exercise of the other powers; it can either order them to act or to abstain from action. The hand is a very zealous servant of the senses: it supplies the organ of taste with its provender; it arranges the book before the eyes that desire to read; by its touch upon the instrument it brings to the ear of the musician the sounds which enrapture him; while it also removes such objects as are displeasing, it forms a screen before the eyes to shut off any disturbing spectacle, or it stops the ears when any disagreeable sound is threatening them. If it refuses its assistance or is unable to render it, the senses must suffer many privations.

And all that the hand thus performs, the will can accomplish even more perfectly; or, rather, it is the will that orders all the hand's movements; and it is not to the

external senses only but to the interior faculties also that it grants or refuses its supplies. It determines their action ; it selects the thoughts upon which the memory is to feed ; it presents to the imagination such pictures as are pleasing to it ; it sets the mind to work upon this study or that problem as it thinks fit ; in a word, the will is a queen, who commands and is obeyed.

83. As long as the will does not exercise this right of authority, all that is done by the other powers is valueless ; their actions must have been ordered by the will if they are to possess any merit in God's sight. In vain do the most brilliant lights illumine my intelligence ; if my will remains indifferent, my merit is nought. If, on the other hand, it accepts these lights, if it rejoices in them, if it decides to follow them, they strengthen my mind ; they furnish a super-substantial and wholly Divine nourishment to my spirit ; my entire soul will be fortified thereby ; my human frailty will become strength, my malice transformed into goodness ; my unworthiness, my impurity, will be transmuted into that holiness which is communicated by Divine grace.

The part played by the will, then, is a very important one, since by its intervention the merit or guilt of the acts of all the other faculties is decided. But in order to fulfil its mission adequately, it must know how to rule itself according to the light of faith. These illuminations penetrate the mind ; they are accepted by the will, and the will, thus enlightened, proceeds to govern all the other powers, and to direct their acts towards their supernatural end, which is God.

§ 3. *Disorders which ensue when the Inferior Faculties predominate.*

84. Such is the order established by God. Those who do not respect it—and they are all too many, alas !—introduce disorder into their souls and into their entire lives. This

is what they do who promote the exterior and interior senses to the first place, degrading the intelligence and the will to the second rank: the inferior faculties (those that we share with the brutes) become the rulers, and the angelic factors are subservient to them.

At the outset of the spiritual life these inferior powers which are common to man and to the animals (the senses, the imagination, and the sensitive appetite) are naturally very active; they exercise a preponderating influence in the case of those who are beginning to give themselves up to a life of piety. Before the truths of religion can make a strong impression on such persons, it is necessary that the external senses should be reached or the imagination fired, and that sweet emotions should be awakened in the sensible portion of their nature (the sensitive appetite, as theologians term it), because the superior faculties are not yet strong enough to act alone; they are not yet emancipated. Before their hearts can be softened and they can become capable of making fervent resolutions and performing generous acts of self-sacrifice, they need, for example, music, stately ceremonial and pious pictures to charm the ear, or the eye, and to kindle the imagination and so come to the aid of the reason.

85. Those persons in whom sensibility is still so powerful do not, unfortunately, understand that their condition is an inferior and an imperfect one; they consider their need of sensible devotion very legitimate; they endow their sensations of joy and sorrow with an importance which these things certainly do not possess; they take sentimentality for love, and think that they have ceased to love when they feel nothing, and that they are full of devotion when they are deeply moved. They will not see that these sensible phenomena proceed from the lower part of our nature, and that, being much less noble than the acts produced by the will and the intelligence, the lower should not anticipate the exercise of the higher faculties, but should follow after and be entirely subservient to them.

The soul does not easily emerge from this inferior state in which imagination and sensibility predominate, and for this reason : that, finding its condition most congenial, it does not as a rule wish to leave it. And yet if those who are in this case would but reflect upon the evils of which their sensibility is the cause, upon the errors into which they are drawn by their imagination, they would understand how necessary it is that these faculties should be repressed and regulated by reason and by a strong exercise of the will. When sensibility is aroused, imagination is kindled, and judgment readily goes astray ; the person is misled by his impressions, carried away by his sympathies or antipathies ; he takes his wishes or his fears for facts ; he falls a victim to enthusiasm or discouragement ; the poor mind cannot any more see things as they are ; the will is no longer in command—it follows blindly, and the decisions to which it comes are too often fatal.

In persons whose sensibility is excessive, the judgment is often affected by the imagination, which exaggerates everything that it has to do with. Such persons are afraid of the smallest trials ; their crosses always appear larger and heavier than they really are ; they magnify their least temptations ; they are very inaccurate in their appreciation of any facts which touch them closely, whether happily or painfully ; they greatly exaggerate their import, and pay more attention to impressions than to reason.

One impression easily succeeds another ; and so those who, instead of governing their sensibility and imagination, allow themselves to be subject to them, are fatally versatile and inconstant. They pass easily from joy to sadness, from hope to depression. To-day you find them cheerful, full of courage and ardour ; everything smiles upon them. To-morrow they will be morose, spiritless, without energy, seeing everything through black spectacles. Some trifling incident, some small annoyance, some, it may be, quite incorrect report or little indisposition will have been enough to work this transformation. Reason has had no part in

it; it is imagination and sensibility which have produced this sudden change and which will soon be the cause of another.

86. It is true, as we have just said, that if imagination is kindled and sensibility is enlisted on the side of good, these two powers assist the practice of virtue, and meritorious acts result; but the part played by faith is too small to make the merit other than inconsiderable. Merit comes from the faith which resides in the mind, from the love which is in the will; it owes nothing to imagination or feeling. In those persons of whom we are speaking the intelligence and the will have but a restricted action; the light of faith cannot, then, become abundant, the intelligence is but feebly illuminated, and the will pursues the good with less firmness than one might suppose, because in their apparent ardour there is more excitement than energy.

When piety is merely sentimental it is necessarily superficial; the will may be conscious at times of a lively impulse towards good, but it continues in itself to be soft and devoid of energy; and thence, in spite of passing enthusiasms, result many ineffectual desires, much inconstancy, and little solid virtue. It is not enough, therefore, to have an affectionate heart, to be sensitive with regard to other people's misfortunes, and to have an attraction for devotion if these rich gifts are not illumined by a higher light. If they are not accompanied by a virile energy, a full self-control, the person who has received them may become sentimental, a prey to passion, the sport of the most unreasonable impressions, very zealous over vain objects, ardent in work or undertakings which appeal to his or her tastes, but extremely weak with regard to real duties.

§ 4. *How we should strengthen our Nobler Faculties and bring the Lower Powers into Subjection.*

87. In order truly to live the life of faith, we must relegate each of our powers, then, to its rightful place, and begin by mistrusting the sensibility and the imagination,

repressing emotion, combating our impressions, mastering our enthusiasm, and dominating our moods. And at the same time we must strengthen our reason by weighing all things coolly, acting always with prudence and circumspection, and never coming to a decision without prayer.

The will, too, must be trained in energy by making it produce, for God's sake, acts which cost it dear. Otherwise it will content itself with velleities, ineffectual desires, which lull the conscience to sleep, and which do not possess the value of the faintest effort. Instead of saying resolutely, "*I will* practise humility, renunciation, and mortification at all costs;" instead of showing the sincerity of these resolves by its actions, it will say: "*I should like* to be humbled and mortified." And because it is conscious of these right desires, it considers itself full of excellent dispositions. Because Pilate said within himself, "I would gladly save this just man," he washed his hands, and considered himself blameless. And so those who have none but these feeble desires fancy themselves virtuous, while in reality they are simply cowards.

They also are cowards who, in the face of painful and difficult but necessary duties, excuse themselves, saying: "It is impossible; it is quite out of my power to perform this act of virtue." If they come to the point of blinding themselves and disbelieving in the strength which God has implanted in their souls, if they refuse to bring all their energies into play for the purpose of overcoming the repugnances of Nature, the will, instead of increasing in strength, becomes enervated; it is no longer a sovereign, but a slave.

This duty of fortifying the will also obliges all those who are subject to accesses of nervous excitement to keep a careful watch over themselves. The more you yield to the nerves, the greater the empire that they will exercise over you. Those who do not force themselves to control them, end by partially losing their liberty of choice, and the atrophied will becomes incapable of practising perfect virtue.

88. And, finally, it is necessary to acquiesce in the action of God when, should He so ordain, and after a first period of sensible fervour in which the glow of its first enthusiasm has served to make the practice of virtue easier, He deprives the soul of feeling, and prepares it to receive far higher graces by the medium of the superior faculties. This is a painful moment. The action of the superior powers, particularly when they operate without the concurrence of the sensible faculties, escapes the soul's notice; and this is more especially the case at first. It seems as if we were doing nothing, and had neither faith, nor hope, nor love. At this period many Christians refuse to detach themselves from their sensible emotions; they will not resign themselves to dwell in aridity, to serve God without enjoying the consolations of piety; they seek other consolations, or they do not approach God as frequently as before. They curtail the time devoted to spiritual exercises—that of prayer especially—or they engage in it negligently. They allow themselves to be engrossed in external works, and so those great virtues by which the soul is united to God—faith, hope, and charity—cease to grow within them, and they are unable to attain to the perfect development which God had designed for them.

Faithful souls, on the contrary, cling only the closer to God, as He seems to wish to hide Himself from them. They turn away faithfully from the profane thoughts which take possession of them, and return perseveringly to God; they cheerfully accept the deprivation of all sensible sweetness; they are as exact in their waiting upon God in aridity and impotence as formerly in the sweetness of prayer. They content themselves with acts of faith, which they continue to multiply, without sweetness but without any relaxation, and of submission to the will of God, adoring and praising it, however contrary it may be to their own desires. So their faith becomes purified, developed, and strengthened. God pours fresh illuminations into the soul. It is no longer by way of reflec-

tion, of reason, that the soul is enriched with precious gifts, that it acquires convictions of a profounder depth. God Himself now enlightens it ; He endows it with a spiritual vision more piercing, and of a more extended range than it possessed before. He causes it to penetrate deeper into the truths with which it was already acquainted, but which now become far more striking and fructifying. And then faith becomes more luminous, it emits still brighter rays, and its influence becomes much more powerful upon the whole conduct of life.

CHAPTER XII

ON RECOLLECTION AND UNION WITH GOD

In omnibus viis tuis cogita illum, et ipse diriget gressus tuos (In all thy ways think on Him, and He will direct thy steps).—PROV. iii. 6.

§ 1. *The Thought of God, the Necessary Foundation of the Life of Faith.*

89. IN order to obtain this life of perfect faith it is not sufficient to renounce sensible sweetnesses; we must also, as far as possible, drive all profane objects and worldly cares from the mind, and nourish the soul assiduously on the mysteries of the faith; or, rather, the soul must feed on God—it must, in fact, inhale God, and exhale Him.

Respiration is a necessary process of our natural life. This marvellous phenomenon, which fails to excite our admiration merely because it is so familiar to us, causes us to find in the atmosphere the salutary element which purifies our blood and sustains our vital heat and our life. If this necessary function is accomplished normally, it is because the body is healthy and the organs sound. If the air that we breathe is pure, dry, and buoyant, our health is maintained, or, if necessary, improved; if it is charged with humidity or putrid exhalations, the health is affected, and death may even ensue.

God is the vivifying principle of the faithful soul. It must breathe Him constantly, must seek in Him—in the thought of Him and of His love, that is to say—the perpetual renewal of its spiritual life. And we can only exhale what we have previously inhaled; the air which issues from the lungs is equal in volume to that which has

passed into them. So he alone who has drunk deep of the Divine sweetness can exhale God, breathing forth round about him the Divine perfume. And we give it out in the precise measure in which we have acquired it. If we content ourselves with some few daily aspirations, our spiritual life will be feeble and languishing; if we absorb the Divine fragrance at but rare intervals, how can we emit it freely day by day?

Their error is great who think to continue in a state of union with God by conformity of the will while they lose sight of Him for considerable periods of time. They withdraw from Him insensibly; the atmosphere of their surroundings penetrates them by degrees; natural preoccupations invade their minds, absorb them, and become predominant; and the desire to serve God, without being destroyed, is thus restrained, and its exercise upon the actions becomes slight and intermittent.

And so the spiritual life declines, and a purely natural, or even an entirely mundane, life may take its place. He who arrives at this extremity, he who has ceased to sustain his life in God, who no longer breathes anything but the vitiated air of the world, who in his conversations, thoughts, and sentiments inhales only the poisonous miasma of sin—what can such a one exhale but an impure and nauseating breath? Woe to those that approach him! for they run grave risk of being contaminated by his infection and of contracting his most foul disease.

§ 2. *The Conflict with Useless Thoughts.*

90. What ceaseless vigilance is necessary for those who desire to live the life of faith! They must repress the activity of the mind, struggle against the flood of idle thoughts which invade it in spite of themselves, and preserve interior silence—a much more difficult and more important achievement than the silence which is exterior. This is the great battle which all souls aspiring after the

perfect life must fight, and those who fight it ill can never live the life of faith, will never attain to perfection.

Many and diverse are the thoughts which come to harass the poor human mind; those minor incidents of life—things which have no importance whatsoever, and which we ought to forget as soon as they have passed—return incessantly to our memories, suggesting the most useless reflections. We are occupied about things which we cannot alter; our neighbour's mistakes, his blunders, his wrongdoings, excite our indignation. Instead of asking God to enlighten our brethren and to correct their faults, we sit in judgment upon them in our minds. Politics also furnish their contingent of idle thoughts, for the march of events is not affected by our cogitations. But, more than any others, personal things are the chief source of our idle thinking. We occupy ourselves with criticisms which may have been passed upon us, or which we might encounter in the future, or with the praise which we fancy that we deserve; we think how we might have acted on some bygone occasion and what the results would then have been. And how tenacious and deeply rooted these vain thoughts are! Expel them, and back they come again, like importunate flies which will not be driven away; they renew their buzzing, repeating incessantly what they have already said.

And even when our reflections are legitimate, they often become useless when prolonged. To reflect upon the best means of performing our duty, to consider the proper steps to be taken, to weigh the consequences of our actions, is certainly commendable. But when once we have reviewed the circumstances and decided our course of action, a repetition of the same processes becomes idle, and it is usually a sign that the individual is more concerned as to his personal success or possible humiliation than with the desire to please God. If half an hour's reflection is sufficient, and then for half a day we go over and over the same objections, giving ourselves the identical replies;

if we fall back incessantly into the same preoccupations; if we constantly hold up to ourselves the same hopes—what precious time shall we not have lost?

91. Everyone allows that this mental labour is generally useless, and all fervent souls recognize and deplore the fact that it is very prejudicial to any advance in virtue. There are few, however, who will bring to bear the courage and energy necessary for its curtailment. The mortification of the imagination or of the memory is rarer than the practice of bodily austerities, little as this is understood; and the reason is that it is even more difficult and painful. The maxim of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Ignatius—"Be like a corpse" (*Perinde ac cadaver*)—might be applied here, with a slight variation of its original sense. Be dead to all earthly things—to all those, at any rate, with which you have no concern, or which you have no power to change. To all that happens give only the least possible measure of your attention, sufficient to enable you to fulfil your social duties and to prevent your appearing as an alien amongst your fellow-men. Fix your thoughts on such things only as you are responsible for, and even here let there be no disturbance and anxiety. And, finally, direct your mind, emptied of all earthly thoughts, towards the things of God.

§ 3. *How the Mind should be nourished with Holy Thoughts.*

92. It is impossible, as a matter of fact, to maintain the intelligence in a state of absolute repose; the mind is incessantly at work; thought is as necessary to it as air is to the lungs. According to the Fathers of the desert, as transmitted by Cassian (*Conf.*, i. 18), our minds are the mills, the wheels of which, set in motion by the water of the river, communicate a continuous movement to the millstones. The river's flowing does not depend upon the human will, but it lies in the power of the master to decide whether the mill shall be employed in the grinding of wheat,

barley, or tares. So we are free to offer to our minds either idle thoughts or salutary reflections. Often, it is true, we shall not be the absolute masters ; in spite of us, the mill will fill itself with trifles and vanities. These will be the tares which find their way in ; but often, also, we shall provide it with materials for its labours, and we shall constrain it to produce for our heart's nourishment pure and strengthening food.

93. Amongst all the holy thoughts that might occupy our minds, which should we prefer ? We must consult the supernatural instincts implanted in us by the Holy Spirit, and return faithfully to those truths which He renders ever more and more luminous and attractive to us.

Some are taken captive, as it were, by the thought of the salvation of souls. The picture of the Good Shepherd, seeking after His lost sheep, lavishing His devotion upon them, desirous at all costs of snatching them from the evil which threatens them, is ever before their eyes. To these the Divine Master communicates His burning zeal for souls. Others feel themselves constantly drawn towards the Tabernacle ; the Most Adorable Sacrament is the centre of all their thoughts, of their care, their love. Some nourish their hearts with meditations upon the Holy Childhood and the Holy Family ; they steep themselves in the simplicity and the humility of Nazareth. Others are never at rest away from Calvary ; they are penetrated with the patience and the love of the Cross.

But whatever the virtue for which the individual soul feels an attraction, it is important that we should not consider it in itself, after the manner of the philosophers, contenting ourselves with examining its foundations and weighing its advantages. We should be in great danger of not considering it long under its supernatural aspects, and of passing involuntarily from the thought of this virtue to some worldly consideration. The heart which is made for God must have God Himself. We must look at each virtue in Jesus, the model of all virtues, rising from the

consideration of His Sacred Humanity to the thought of His Divinity. Jesus is the Way that leads to the Father. He calls the faithful soul, bidding it plunge into that infinite ocean of beauty and love in which it is to take its delight, and from which it will never again entirely emerge, even when it applies itself to its ordinary and profane duties. For so it is that, whatever the road by which it has come to God, when once a soul has found Him and tasted of His sweetness, it can never again depart from Him ; for it finds in Him its light and its strength, its joy and its all. Such is the life of faith in its full perfection, and thus does the just soul live by faith—*justus ex fide vivit.*

CHAPTER XIII

THE VIRTUE OF HOPE

Sperantem in Domino misericordia circumdabit (Mercy shall encompass him that hopeth in the Lord).—Ps. xxxi. 10.

§ 1. *Its Connection with the Other Theological Virtues.*

94. When the intellect has been set free from the tyranny of the imagination, when it has succeeded in emptying itself of the profane objects which formerly absorbed its attention, faith, finding no further obstacles, illuminates it with still brighter rays, bringing it to a better knowledge and a more constant contemplation of God—the only object worthy of this knowledge and contemplation. And thus the human intelligence becomes united to Him by faith.

And the will, how shall *it* achieve its union with God? In the presence of this infinite Beauty, this supreme and unique Good which faith has made known to it, is it to remain inert? Not so. God, who acts upon the intelligence in order to communicate the grace of faith, will operate at the same time upon the will; He will give it a supernatural impulse towards the infinite Good which is revealed to it. And this impulse, received from God and accepted freely by the will, this supernatural desire for the supreme Good, is the second cardinal virtue—that of holy hope.

It is not sufficient that God should be presented to the Christian soul as the supreme Good, to cause its desires and its hopes to go out towards Him. This longed-for Good—is it accessible? Is it possible for a poor human

creature to possess, to rejoice in this good for evermore? It realizes its unworthiness; it recognizes in itself all kinds of obstacles—evil desires, inveterate passions, it may be, and an immense frailty, as shown in the past by innumerable falls.

But God has promised—God who cannot lie. His mercy is infinite, His goodness unwearying. He wills that all men should be saved, and His boundless strength sustains the extreme weakness of those who put their trust in Him. And therefore it is that the soul can hope to attain to that sublime goal—the possession of God.

And not only *may* the soul hope for this, but it *must* do so. If a want of faith is an injury to God, because it supposes Him capable of deceiving us, to lack hope is to do Him the same wrong; for it implies that He may fail in His promises, or else it is to doubt either His power or His goodness. Sins against these virtues are very grave, because they directly attack the attributes of the Almighty.

The object of hope, therefore, is God, recognized as the one true and only Good worthy of the aspirations of the Christian soul. And the motive by which we hope for this supreme Good is the merciful loving-kindness of God, His infinite power, and His promise which cannot fail.

95. Hope follows, then, in the train of faith, of which it is, as it were, the extension and the expansion. From a feeble faith will proceed a vacillating hope, from a lively and enlightened faith a hope ardent and solid. The better we understand (thanks to the light of faith) the Divine splendours, the sweetness of possessing God, the nothingness of all other rewards which entice the will, so much the more shall we aspire after Him. At the same time, the better we understand how powerful and wise God is—how merciful and desirous, in His immense goodness, of giving Himself to His poor creatures, the more we shall hope that He will know how to break down all barriers, to bring good out of evil, and lead us at last to the happiness He has in store for us.

Those who plead the thought of their own sins as a reason for the feebleness of their faith put forward a very poor excuse. "I know God's mercy," they say, "but I also know my sinfulness and weakness, and this is the cause of all my distress of mind." But they do *not* know the Divine compassion, or they know it very insufficiently; they diminish it in their thoughts; they insult it, refusing to believe that it is boundless and always efficacious if the heart is truly contrite. They will not understand all the greatness of God's love for their souls; their faith is imperfect, for by their own fault they form an unjust conception of His attributes.

96. If hope proceeds from faith, it leads to love. From the moment that we accept the impulse which carries us on to such a desirable Good, how can we help being enraptured with His infinite perfections and seeking to please Him whose benevolent promises, whose paternal forbearance, whose inexhaustible clemency Hope ever holds before our eyes? The soul that yields to discouragement perceives its love flagging; the soul that yields to despair watches it die. It chooses to see in God a loving Father no longer, but a pitiless Master; it withdraws itself from Him, and then it begins to feel those first stirrings of that hatred which consumes the hearts of the devils and of the lost—those victims of everlasting despair. While, on the contrary, *from a great hope a great love proceeds*—a love powerful and ardent, stimulated by difficulties, growing through conflict, invincible through victory.

97. A wonderful harmony exists between the different supernatural virtues; they assist one another; they mutually sustain and fortify each other, giving back good for good received. Love, stimulated by hope, strengthens and perfects hope in its turn. Hope without love would soon become presumptuous, as an illustration will show. A certain man, desirous of gain, hired himself out to the service of a generous master, the arrangement being that the covenanted wages were to be paid at the end of a year

of good and loyal service. But from the outset, the servant, yielding to the persuasion of some of his friends, gives them all his time, entirely neglecting his master's affairs. On Sunday he goes to him and offers his excuses, makes a thousand promises, and assures him of his entire devotion and unshakable attachment. And then he begins to act as he did before: "My master is so kind," he says to himself; "he will certainly pay me my wages all the same." Now, the master was indeed good and wonderfully patient, but he was also inflexibly just. So when the year had thus expired and the servant came to claim his wages, the master replied: "Go and seek your wages of those for whom you have worked; you have done nothing for me; I see no sign of your labour. You have sowed nothing here, and neither shall you reap." Alas! the friends who had turned this faithless servant from his duties were incapable of giving him any assistance, and his fate could not fail to have been a most miserable one.

This master is God. He is very Justice, and recompenses, not hypocritical protestations, but works. The seducing friends stand for the world, which is incapable of giving anything of solid value to those who labour for it.

When a real love is joined to hope, there is no fear of such misapprehensions. Hope, sustained by works, cannot fail to grow in strength and to be the cause of an increase of love. In perfect souls, on fire with the purest charity, hope is intermingled with love, and melts into it; for the thought of Heaven, where the faithful soul will see God, where it will taste Him, where it will love Him freely and glorify Him to the utmost of its powers, fills it with delight. It hopes to be able to love with all its ability; and is not this to love already with an ardent affection? And does not the joy that it feels in the thought of its untrammelled love proceed even more from charity than from hope? These aspirations of love attain frequently to the highest plane; the generous soul has no thought but that of giving pleasure to the Beloved; it does not ask itself what the

result will be for itself ; and it may even protest that its action would be the same, although no personal advantage could accrue thereby.

§ 2. *The Benefits of Hope.*

98. Hope is a need of the soul. We live by hope ; nearly all our acts tend towards a future which we do not yet possess. The labourer sows in expectation of the harvest ; he reaps in the hope of obtaining a market for his crops. If the merchant labours and toils, it is that he is led on by the hope of gain ; the youth, in his work and studies, is inspired by the thought of the future that he has marked out for himself, the father of a family by that which he looks forward to for his children. Hope is the strength of the soul, the source of effort, the secret of courage and action.

All those who have persevered in long and laborious undertakings have been sustained by a firm and lively hope. Moses aspires to deliver his people ; the success of the enterprise seems impossible, the obstacles insurmountable. The Egyptian oppressors will not let the Hebrews go ; they are employed in all the hardest tasks, and their departure would be a national calamity. Their only response to the first appeal that Moses made was to lay upon them even heavier burdens than before, and the Israelites' resentment was consequently kindled against the man who wished to be their deliverer. Moses, with God's aid, triumphs over all these multiplied difficulties, and he is successful in leading Israel out of Egypt. And then, hardly freed from slavery, the Israelites become mutinous ; they murmur against the Almighty who has already worked such marvels on their behalf. Moses pacifies them ; he obtains fresh signs from Heaven, and brings the people to repentance. Soon there are renewed murmurings against him ; the Israelites cry out that they will die of hunger, and God rains down manna upon them ; but the people are soon weary of it—they wish to return to Egypt. Then

comes the adoration of the golden calf. Now it is Aaron himself and Mary who are murmuring against Moses their brother; now the spies sent forward into the Land of Promise stir up the people to revolt. Then a lack of water causes fresh complaints. Finally, the various inhabitants of the country attempt to oppose the passage of the Israelites by force of arms, and they are obliged successively to fight and conquer the Amalecites, the Madianites, and Og, the King of Basan. The Moabites, more dangerous still, lead a part of the people away into their pagan abominations. It is impossible to read the account of the departure from Egypt and the wanderings of God's people in the desert without feeling admiration for the constancy which Moses displayed—a constancy which was never shaken by any ordeal, which continued immutable to the last, strong with a superhuman strength, Moses being withal the meekest of men. And he derives this heroic constancy from his invincible hope; while terror and discouragement reign all round about him he never ceases to put his trust in God; he pursues his mission unwaveringly unto the end.

History shows us by numerous examples what a firm hope can accomplish, and what a pledge of success it contains. Why is it that men must always turn their desires towards false gods? Why must they embark in the most perilous enterprises, undergoing the most laborious toil for the sake of empty rewards? How the ambitious man strives after honour, the miser after gold! No dangers check them, no difficulties daunt them, repulses do not discourage them. On they go; should they fail, they at once renew their endeavours; and if, on the contrary, they succeed a little, this success only further stimulates their ardour; for so long as they have not gained all, it seems to them that they have gained nothing. What a misfortune that so much courage and perseverance should be thus absolutely thrown away! *Filii hominum usquequo . . . diligitis vanitatem et quæritis mendacium?* (Oh, ye sons

of men, how long will you . . . love vanity and seek after lying ?—Ps. iv. 3). Ah ! if you longed with a like ardour after true riches, if you felt the same confidence as to obtaining them, you would bring an equal energy and perseverance into their pursuit ; and then to what a height of virtue would you attain ! how richly would you be rewarded, sooner or later, for all your labours !

99. It is because hope multiplies the strength tenfold, because a soul animated by a firm hope is capable of raising itself to the highest state of perfection, that the Devil makes such furious assaults upon this virtue. Of the three theological virtues, none is so frequently the target for his attacks, those temptations against the others—against faith and purity—being often nothing but feints. For the enemy does not flatter himself that he is going to destroy these virtues ; he is only trying to trouble the soul and to undermine hope within it. How many pious souls are tempted to discouragement, and how many allow themselves to fall ! They have no dread of these failures of hope ; they do not understand the immense harm that they do themselves thereby. They do not even see, poor blind creatures that they are ! that the feelings of depression which assail them are the suggestions of Satan. It seems quite natural to them to be in a state of excessive anxiety ; they consider it a proof of wisdom and prudence ; perhaps they even take their cowardice for humility. But above all they will not see what an offence they commit against the goodness, the power, the wisdom of God, when they thus lose confidence. What are their miseries compared with the riches of the Almighty, their weakness beside His infinite strength ? Even their sins, grave and numerous as they may have been, are not, when once sincerely repented of, more than a tiny drop of mud cast into the ocean of His Divine compassion.

100. And in yielding itself to discouragement the soul also withdraws itself from grace ; for God, wounded by this lack of confidence, no longer gives it the same assistance.

Its energy then becomes impaired, and it is like a soldier who will not fight, like a workman who throws down his tools, or rather like a madman who gives up his arms to his mortal foe, to be loaded with chains and reduced by him to slavery.

And with what desolation does the soul become filled! Its bitterness is without alleviation; no ray of sunshine penetrates through the mists; no star lights up its night. And so it often tries to console itself, to find distraction in vanities, trifles and intemperate conversations which bring dissipation and are a fresh occasion of sin. The evil only grows worse; fluctuating between dissipation and depression, the discouraged soul loses the taste for virtue, relaxes its efforts, and falls deplorably.

101. Hope, on the other hand, is the Christian exile's most precious consolation. Faith is our soul's substantial bread, for it feeds the mind with Divine truths; while hope is, as it were, our cup of spiritual refreshment, a cup as sweet as it is salutary; it is the generous wine which rejoices man's heart, making it ever stronger and more active for good.

The faithful soul knows that it will see God, that it will taste Him, that it will be inebriated by His beauty; and this thought sustains and entrances it. Already it rejoices in its happiness, it delights in advance in its ineffable felicity; and its pains and labours appear not only supportable, but actually sweet. Is not this the ambrosia which seasons our life's banquet, which consoles and ravishes all those who have recourse to it with avidity?

102. And yet we encounter faithful souls who, far from tasting the sweet consolations of hope, are a prey to the attacks of a black despair; they torment themselves as to their ultimate salvation; severe accesses of anguish oppress them and darken their whole lives with a veil of sadness Has hope vanished, then, entirely from these sombre hearts? Not so. It is still there, although hidden and often unknown even to the person most nearly concerned. He is

often quite unable to produce any distinct acts of hope, he is ignorant of its strength, and can no longer peacefully enjoy the sweetness which it usually brings. And yet, whence does his faith proceed? What is it that fortifies him against such violent assaults, save the inextinguishable conviction that the just and good God will one day reward him? And through all this tempest the man's faith grows purer and stronger, and with it likewise his love. How often will he not say: "God is infinitely good. His mercy knows no bounds. He loves me with the tenderest affection; why, then, should I fear? Let me cease to think of the future, whatever it may bring, and let me love God to-day and strive to-day to serve Him!" This is a highly meritorious act of love, and very profitable for the soul's advancement. The providential aim of these trials is easily understood; he who accepts them courageously becomes more detached from self, and more closely united to God.

103. Very different is the feeble and cowardly soul that accepts the suggestions of the demon of despair; it stops short and discontinues its pious works, which it truly considers useless; for its discouragement throws it into a state of spiritual paralysis which is most fatal. This soul is not merely tempted, but it actually sins against hope, and its sin is the more dangerous because it is scarcely aware of it, and does not wish to relinquish it. It insists that its views are correct, that it has but too much reason for losing courage; it refuses to admit that it no longer adores God's goodness and love; having no horror of its fault, it gives itself up to it without any resistance, and will not believe those who seek to enlighten it and arouse it from its torpor.

104. Between the two classes of souls thus tempted against hope (one of which is always victorious, whilst the other yields constantly to discouragement) we could range a considerable number who are vacillating and uncertain, who only struggle feebly, without, however, letting them-

selves be entirely vanquished. Their hope is weak because their faith and their love are also weak. Such souls as these do not merit the blessed consolations which hope gives to more enlightened and ardent Christians. They may obtain their salvation by observing God's laws, but how can they taste of His sweetness? They are not closely united to Him; they have not that profound peace which is the result of an absolute trust and a complete surrender into God's hands.

105. But it is in prayer especially that hope displays its value and its power. Prayer is itself an act of hope; fervour in prayer, the difficult means, such as retreats and acts of self-sacrifice, to which we have recourse in order to make it more fruitful, all testify to the liveliness of this virtue; while the graces obtained by fervent prayer show how agreeable a thing is hope to God.

The aged Tobias, seeing his wife angered at the misfortunes which befell him, thinks that it will be better and more desirable that he should die, and he prays God to permit this in a most touching and humble prayer. And far away, at the same moment, Sara, one of his young relatives, equally convinced that it is better that she too should perish, is offering the same petition to God with the same submission and the same confidence. Each blesses God and proclaims His justice and goodness; each, while breathing forth these prayers, commits himself, herself, into God's hands, and shows the strength of this hope; each speaks the language of the deepest humility, the liveliest gratitude. They pray, and believe that their prayers are heard. But when they perceive that instead of dying they continue to live, their trust is not weakened, and their constant and loving submission to the Divine Will does not fail. Their prayers were indeed answered, but in another and a better fashion than that which they expected.

He who prays thus cannot fail to have his petitions granted; this ardent hope is a homage rendered to the Divine Goodness and Wisdom that is all-powerful with

the Heart of God. Is it not thanks to her touching trust, which our Saviour's rebuffs were unable to weaken, that the Chanaanitish woman obtained her daughter's cure from the devil that troubled her (St. Matt. xv. 22-28). When St. Peter, full of trust, cast himself into the sea in order to go to Jesus, the waters became resistant beneath his feet, and they parted under him again when his hope wavered.

§ 3. *How we should strengthen Hope.*

106. It is a great favour from God, a result of His wisdom no less than of His love, that the seeds of hope, this supernatural virtue, should have been deposited in every Christian heart ; before desiring it, we already possess it, and it is quite easy for us to cause it to increase and to make it the support and consolation of our lives.

The frequent, the habitual dwelling in thought upon God's power and His love for our souls is the surest means by which we can strengthen our hope. Those who, when confronted with some necessary work, such as the evangelization of a country or the conversion of a parish, fold their arms and say, "Nothing can be done," consoling, or rather excusing, themselves by eulogizing the past, in which, if we were to believe them, good was so easily accomplished, are gravely culpable. If their hope were more lively, they would set to work courageously and untiringly, resorting to the means which apostles have employed in all ages—constant prayer, a generous practice of penance, and an indefatigable devotion and charity ; and God would finally bless their efforts, and would cause them to see the fruits of their zeal.

Nor is their hope very supernatural or lively who neglect these apostolic methods and rely upon human methods in the exercise of their zeal. *Ecce homo, qui non posuit Deum adjutorem suum* (Behold the man that made not God his helper—Ps. li. 9). Behold the men who do not look to God for succour, who do not rely upon Him for their

success, and yet profess all the time to be doing His work!

In the work of our sanctification it is in God, again, that we must place our hope. Our own efforts are necessary, but rather in order to put ourselves into proper dispositions for the reception of His gifts than to form ourselves in virtue. God exacts our efforts in proof of the sincerity of our desires and for the removal of the obstacles which oppose themselves to His action. Then He Himself intervenes, for He alone, by His direct action, by the highest graces, gives perfect virtues to the souls who have placed their entire trust in Him. We must remember this, without losing sight of the fact that God yearns to enrich us with His gifts. "There is nothing," says St. Alphonsus Rodriguez, "which God bestows as readily as His love."

107. Hope becomes strong, therefore, within us, as we are more and more convinced of God's power, His benevolence, and His tenderness, because these things are the foundations of hope. But for its further growth it is necessary that we should develop our esteem and longing for the great blessings which He has promised us and which are the objects of our hope.

To hope is a necessity of our nature; it is the first of the four passions, or tendencies, of the human heart. These four passions, which are closely connected with one another, and which should be watched and controlled, are hope (or desire), joy, fear, and sorrow. The human heart fluctuates constantly between these various sentiments. The good things which are presented to the eyes or the memory attract it; it rejoices when it has obtained them. The ills with which it is threatened terrify it, and when they have actually overtaken it the heart is saddened. And as the life of every intelligent being is a succession of good and evil happenings, so these various sentiments succeed one another uninterruptedly. According to the direction which these diverse sentiments take, the soul inclines to good or to evil, towards virtue or vice; it will be meritorious

or culpable according to the nature of the things that it longs to possess and the evils which it desires to shun. He who covets and hopes for none but evil pleasures will sink into the mire of sin ; he will plunge into those abysmal depths into which the Devil yearns to entice him. He who allows himself no other aspiration and desire than that of supernatural hope will daily mount higher into the regions of virtue.

It in no way rests with us to hope or not to hope, just as to think or not to think does not depend upon our choice, but we can and we must select the object of our hopes. If we cast from us even the memory of those things that are unworthy of our aspirations, and set ourselves to fix our attention incessantly upon those great gifts, the eternal blessings which are reserved for us, our hope will take a holy orientation, and will direct our entire lives in the paths which lead to God.

The Israelites in the desert were without this wholly supernatural hope which was so noticeable in their leader. Moses, as St. Paul says (Heb. xi. 23-26), " looked unto the reward," the heavenly treasures, hailing them from afar off, regarding himself as a stranger and a sojourner on the earth, hungering for the eternal recompense. And so the hope of Heaven sustained his heroic courage. His fellow-countrymen, on the contrary, as Holy Scripture tells us, were looking back upon the flesh-pots of Egypt, the fish and the cucumbers, the melons and leeks, the onions and the garlic (Num. xi. 5). The thought of earthly things attracted them more strongly than any heavenly blessings could do, and hence their continual rebellion and the hardness of their hearts—a hardness which the most astonishing marvels, the continued favours which God showered upon them, were powerless to soften.

108. Christian reader, what are *your* aspirations ? Put this question to your heart : " *Do you always strive to turn your hopes towards heavenly blessings ? Do you set yourself constantly to put to death all purely natural desires within*

you?" Of course you wish to go to Heaven; you would not, on any account, seek after earthly things at the expense of your salvation. But when these earthly advantages, these natural satisfactions, can be secured without any notable wrong-doing, do you not consider their desire legitimate, and do you not attempt to secure them? If several times in the day you examine the dispositions of your heart, the motive of your actions, the end which you are proposing to follow, do you not discover many purely human sentiments? and are you not constrained to admit that many of your actions have not God for their sole aim? If you never make this examination, you have but little acquaintance with your heart, and you will have some great surprises on the day when the Judge who cannot err will reveal you to yourselves, and will unroll before your eyes the picture of your entire lives. You will understand then, too late, one of the great obstacles to the attainment of the perfection of love in this earthly life. While there is still time, then, cast from you all human desires; *become like a dead man*, passive under every kind of treatment, caresses and blows, praise and blame. Put yourself into a state of entire and holy indifference as regards all the satisfactions and inconveniences of Nature; direct your desires and hopes to none but holy things, spiritual blessings, the Christian virtues, and, above all, to God, who will be your recompense and your eternal felicity.

109. And in order that you may vivify the hope of Heaven within you, set yourself to understand—it may be that you have not hitherto done so sufficiently—what are the joys that shall await you there. When we meditate upon the even accidental, the secondary happiness of Paradise, our eyes are dazzled.

There all the secrets of Nature, of which the greatest savants here only know the least portion—and even this suffices to enkindle their delight and their love—will be made known to us. We shall see all those earthly beauties

which enchant the artist's soul and others which are infinitely more exquisite still in the spiritual world; all those whom we have loved on earth we shall meet again in Heaven, and shall find them incomparably more lovable than ever before. The Angels and the Saints will be our friends—friends who will delight us with their perfection, their goodness, their knowledge, and celestial beauty. And Mary, our dear Mother, so majestic and so maternal, so fair to see, so sweet to love; one hour passed in the proximity of this beloved Mother would suffice to compensate us for all the sorrows of our lives. And what a still greater rapture will inundate our hearts when we come to the enjoyment of the friendship of Jesus! Each trait of His life, all that He has done and suffered for us, will be made plain to us; the full riches of His love will be manifested. To each and to all He will give Himself, this beloved Saviour, more perfectly and with an even more enthralling sweetness than in the Eucharistic Union. He will communicate Himself to our souls by an uninterrupted communion, the delight of which will be of such intoxicating intensity that our utmost strength will be required to bear it. And all these joys will be as nothing in comparison with the essential happiness which will consist in the contemplation and adoration of the Divinity. In possession alone can we contemplate God and love Him. To possess God in Three Persons, to enjoy God in His infinite perfection, to enjoy Him in so far as our merits have made us capable—ah! what a sublime hope! Happy the souls who have received the vivid illuminations of faith upon these great truths; well do they know that one degree of glory is a thousand times more precious than all the joys of earth, and that in order to attain to it, in order to arrive at the possession of God in a still greater measure, no effort, however painful, no sacrifice, however heavy, can appear too great.

CHAPTER XIV

JOY

Gaudete in Domino semper, iterum dico, gaudete (Rejoice in the Lord always ; again I say, rejoice).—PHIL. iv. 4.

§ 1. *Natural Joys.*

110. IF the desire and hope of earthly goods stifle the holy aspirations of supernatural hope, complacency in these goods, the pleasure that is tasted when they are enjoyed, likewise arrests the soul's upward flight, and hinders it from devoting itself with energy and perseverance to the pursuit of supernatural good.

Must we not, then, rejoice here below ? Joy, like hope, is a necessity of the human heart, the one leads on to the other. We hope to be happy ; we necessarily desire joy and happiness. Joy is love satisfied. We cannot live without loving and without the satisfaction of our love. Joy is the life of the soul, the repose of the heart—a repose in which it renews its strength and fits itself for fresh labours. Moreover, joy radiates ; he that possesses it sheds it on all about him, and with it courage and ardour ; while, on the other hand, joyless souls are souls without energy, and to all who approach they communicate not their sadness only, but also their sloth and torpor.

This is why we are slow to speak of our sorrows ; we hide them, rather, under an appearance of gaiety, but this feigned happiness cannot produce the effects of real joy.

Let us rejoice, therefore, in accordance with the Apostle's counsel : " Rejoice in the Lord always ; again I say, rejoice "

(Phil. iv. 4). God wills that we should be always joyous, and He Himself is the infinite, the only true Joy. He sheds it upon all who draw near to Him. In aspiring after God we aspire after joy and happiness; living in God we live in this happiness and this joy.

Let us not mistake. Many are the feigned joys which seduce our poor human nature, but let us not follow after them, for they are false delights and wholly unworthy of our hearts.

111. First there are *the diabolic joys*. Lucifer and his infernal crew take pleasure in the evil which they accomplish, in the sins of which they are the cause, in the tortures which they inflict. Are they successful in seducing us, in making us fall into some pit which they have prepared? They wear all the appearance of satisfaction, and by certain signs—a sort of frightful merriment—they signal their successes to their companions. Their horrible laughter is also to be heard when they are wreaking their rage upon the damned whom they have dragged down into the abyss. But this is not a true joy, because joy is love satisfied, and the demons are strangers to love. From hatred love can never be born; hatred is never content, its thirst is unslakable. Every joy which proceeds from an evil accomplished, from a vengeance achieved, is a diabolic counterfeit of the true joy, and one after which no Christian can ever seek.

112. Then there are *the earthly joys*, noisy perhaps, but hollow rather than solid, leaving behind them nothing but emptiness and weariness. These are the joys which people seek to obtain by yielding to their passions; it is the pleasure of the sensual man who thinks to find happiness in good cheer; it is the joy of the ambitious, when they obtain the honours which they have coveted so ardently; of the vain, who have succeeded in winning admiration; of the worldling, plunging into every manner of dissipating pleasure. To abandon ourselves to these unwholesome gratifications is to give strength to our passions and to do

a serious injury to the soul. A Christian should refuse his consent from the moment when he is first conscious of the temptation.

113. There are also *natural joys*: nature is greedy to see, to hear, to taste, to feel; it loves recreation; games, walks, amusements attract it strongly. He who would love God perfectly should never seek these satisfactions for their own sakes; he must avail himself of them only when the needs of the body require it, when charity demands it. By the supernatural motive with which the Christian is inspired, these joys are then purified and sanctified; but with what care must he watch over his heart in order to guard against any complaisance in these human joys, any attachment to these natural pleasures. If, in the presence of an enemy making perpetual attacks, the soldiers of an army were to be occupying themselves in hunting, gathering flowers, or playing cards. instead of giving back fire for fire to the foe, they would be guilty of treason towards their country; if in the spring-time the farmer spent his days in taking pleasant walks instead of sowing the grain, relinquishing all idea of a harvest, and running the risk of having no food for his children, how great would be his responsibility! Life is a warfare in which we must fight for God's glory and for His interests; it is a field in which we must scatter the seed for our eternal harvesting. Every moment that we devote to nature without a supernatural motive, but simply for its own satisfaction, is lost for God's glory, lost for our own eternal happiness; and as God has placed us on this earth in order that we may glorify Him, and as every single moment of our time is His, we are also robbing God of His property.

And these human joys deprave the heart which takes pleasure in them, making all spiritual delights seem insipid to it. We cannot serve two masters; we cannot find our pleasure in such contrary things as the satisfaction of our nature and the joys of religion. And further, he who finds his delight in the first, loses his taste for the second, and

ceases to make any but ineffectual efforts to obtain them. And finally, these human joys, which are not satisfied love, but rather satisfied egotism, throw the soul back upon itself. The more gratification we allow to nature the more it desires; devotion wanes, self-sacrifice and the immolation of our nature for God become more and more difficult to us.

But beyond these joys there are others, appertaining also to nature, but nobler, more legitimate, and more easily supernaturalized. Such are the joys of friendship, of family life. God, who has permitted them, and who has made this love a duty, sends down His blessing upon them; but we must, nevertheless, watch over them, lest they become too engrossing, lest they exceed their proper boundaries, and become detrimental to our love of God: generous souls, possessed by this holy love, prefer to deprive themselves of these joys rather than expose themselves to the risk of exceeding their proper limits.

§ 2. *Supernatural Joys.*

114. The deepest joys, the only joys worthy of the name, are supernatural. These joys are born of faith and charity. The more brilliant the light of faith that presents motives for rejoicing to the mind, the greater the resulting felicity. And they increase with the growth of love, because joy is nothing but the satisfaction of love. A feeble faith, a lukewarm love, will not suffice to engender spiritual joys; and so the ordinary Christian has no experience of them, and will often, indeed, refuse to believe in them.

These spiritual joys, well known and appreciated by faithful souls, are of two kinds: affective joys and mystic joys. The first are always accompanied by sweet emotions in the sensitive appetite, and we style these sensible consolations. Souls who are novices in piety know no other joys than these, and they display a great eagerness

for them. Mystic joys are more secret. They may react upon the sensible part, but often the heart experiences no pleasurable emotions; they bring about a deep satisfaction, a manifestly infused peace; the soul, without being moved, feels calm and happy. These last joys, which suppose a markedly bright illumination of faith, are of all others the most precious and the most desirable. They are located in the highest part of the will, and in order to taste them fully, the activity of the sensible faculties must have been much reduced, and the strength of the superior faculties greatly enhanced.

115. Four times in the Holy Bible we read that Our Lord's friends rejoiced. The first occasion is the passage where St. Luke describes the mission of the seventy-two disciples. Jesus had sent them on before Him, to prepare the way. He had charged them to teach and to preach; in a word, to inaugurate their life's ministry; and in order to fit them for their task, He had dowered them with the most precious gifts, the gift of healing the sick, and of casting out devils. And then, after having begun this work, and having achieved it successfully, they returned to Our Lord, full of joy: *Reversi sunt autem septuaginta duo cum gaudio* (And the seventy-two returned with joy—St. Luke x. 17).

Our joy, too, must be found in the gifts which we receive from God. The Divine benefits are without number; there is no single moment in our lives in which God does not shed upon us precious gifts of the natural and the supernatural order. And joy should be, as it were, the perfume of our gratitude. What would any earthly benefactor say if he saw his favours accepted with a melancholy air, and thanks rendered with an appearance of ill-humour? What should we ourselves say in such a case?

To show pleasure at a benefit conferred is the first duty of a grateful heart; for he thereby proves how much he appreciates the gifts that he has received. Can we ever rejoice enough because of the gift of faith, the gift of holy

Baptism, the gift of all the graces which enlighten us, impel us to virtue, uphold and sanctify us ?

The second duty of gratitude is to spend ourselves gladly for our benefactor. It should be a contest of generosity ; we should show ourselves happy to repay him. The delight which we feel in working for God is the best proof of our gratitude and love ; it marks the value of our works. God cannot be pleased with those who serve Him sadly ; while, on the other hand, He loves those who give joyfully. *Hilarem datorem diligit Deus* (God loveth a cheerful giver—2 Cor. ix. 7). This was the joy of the seventy-two disciples. They had received great gifts from God, and they had spent them in the task which He had confided to them. But this joy is not always perfectly pure, feelings of personal complaisancy being often mingled with it. The soul is happy in God's gifts, but is also happy that these gifts should have descended upon its own dear person ; the first joy is supernatural, the second natural. A man is glad because he has been able to procure God's glory by his works, but he also congratulates himself upon being the happy workman. It would seem that the seventy-two were not wholly exempt from some feeling of self-love, for Our Lord answered them by giving them this paternal warning : " Rejoice not in this, that spirits are subject unto you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven " (St. Luke x. 20).

The soul that aspires to a true love must strive carefully to purify even its spiritual joys from all the satisfactions of self-love. Otherwise its natural sensations of contentment in its successes will prevent God from giving Himself with such abundance as He would otherwise do ; it will find its union with the Beloved impeded, its prayers less constant and less fervent. The distractions of pious souls come more often than they think from this invasion of the natural into their inner feelings—even those of them which seem best, such as their longings after virtue, their joy in good works accomplished, the dread of sin, or the

sadness which arises out of faults which they have committed.

116. The second passage in the Gospels where the joy of Our Lord's friends is referred to, is that in which St. John, after speaking of the Resurrection and of Our Lord's appearing to the Apostles, tells us *Gavisi sunt discipuli viso Domino* (The disciples therefore were glad when they saw the Lord—St. John xx. 20).

They had lost their beloved Master, a cruel death seemed to have snatched Him away from them for ever. And behold! He was restored to them! They had lost Him under circumstances which must have aroused in them the most poignant grief. One of them had denied Him, the others had abandoned Him. And now the good Saviour, in appearing to them, seems to have forgotten it all. His face wears no frown, His voice is no less sweet, nor His looks less tender. Instead of reproaching them, He wishes them peace: *Pax vobis*. Then, again, His whole Person is transformed. He is more beautiful, kinder than before. The splendour of His glorious Body, although tempered, in consideration for the weakness of their human vision, is plainly apparent, the rays of immortality shine around His brow. They understand as they gaze at Him —their Master victorious over death—that He will die no more, that they need have no further fear of losing Him; their joy is easy to understand.

How pitiable is the condition of the soul that has lost God! Whatever may be its success in the world, if it is separated from God by sin, its state is a deplorable one. But how happy the soul that has found Him again, that holds fast the hope of never losing Him any more! *Inveni quem diligit anima mea, tenui eum, nec dimittam* (I found Him whom my soul loveth. I held Him, and I will not let Him go—Cant. iii. 4). Happy also is the soul that finds God in prayer, and enjoys the consolations of piety, tasting Him and delighting in the sweetness of His presence in Holy Communion. Sweet and holy joys,

purifying, life-giving pleasures! Let us seek after them, let us take hold of them for the nourishment of our souls, let us draw fresh strength from the springs of their inexhaustible sweetness.

117. When Our Lord had said farewell to His own; when, under their astonished eyes, He had risen in majesty into the heavens, the disciples returned to Jerusalem; and on this occasion also, St. Luke tells us of their joy: *Regressi sunt in Jerusalem cum gaudio magno* (And they . . . went back into Jerusalem with great joy—St. Luke xxiv. 52).

At first sight this joy seems strange. Their Master has left them; never again will they see His face on earth, or hear the sound of His voice. How, then, can they rejoice? Truly their love is nobler, higher, more perfect than that which filled their hearts a month ago, on the evening of that Easter Day; truly it is more disinterested.

For whence is this joy, save from the fact that they have just been witnesses to their Lord's triumph? His omnipotence has manifested itself in the calm and the majesty of the Ascension, in the apparition of the Angels who had come to sing His praises. The ignominies of that awful week are indeed avenged. In the face of that Jerusalem by which He was dishonoured and crucified, His glory has been made manifest to the world. He has sat down now for ever at the right hand of the Father, and therefore it is that the heart of His friends must overflow with joy. Of small moment to them are their own personal sufferings. They, indeed, are deprived of His presence, but He rejoices in His victory. From the place of His heavenly rest He will look down upon their labours; for again Jesus has reminded them of their mission, has confirmed them in it. Their apostolic life is about to begin; they will pray, they will fight, they will labour; and He from the heavens above, the heavens into which they have just seen Him ascend, will contemplate their efforts; and these thoughts fill their hearts with joy.

And this is perfect joy. God grants it to the soul in proportion as it has renounced all other joys. The life of those who are completely mortified is a continuous festival. God gives them His own joy, the joy of perfect love. He does not wait for Eternity in order to gladden the children of His predilection. They are happy here in God's goodness, happy in the knowledge of His greatness, His perfection, His beauty ; happy with a tranquil, often an insensible, joy, but always a joy deep beyond utterance. And they are happy also in being able to contribute to His joy by a life which is all love and all fidelity.

118. And does this happiness produce exemption from suffering ? Has the earth become a paradise to these friends of God—a paradise in which sorrow is unknown ? Not so ; for suffering must enter into every human life here below ; but those who have attained to perfect love find even in this suffering a subject of joy.

St. Peter and St. John had been preaching Christ, and the Sanhedrin, enraged by their doctrines, caused the Apostles to be brought before them, and condemned them to the torture of scourging. But what does St. Luke tell us ? Again he speaks of their joy and gladness. *Ibant Apostoli gaudentes a conspectu concilii, quoniam digni habiti sunt pro nomine Jesu contumeliam pati* (And they indeed went from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the Name of Jesus —Acts v. 41).

The soul that loves God burns with the desire to please Him ; but as long as its actions cost it but little it feels that it is accomplishing nothing for the Beloved. The loving heart desires to suffer for the beloved one, and hence the exquisite joy of sacrifice. And the lover is also consumed by the desire to resemble the beloved, to imitate him as much as possible, to reproduce his feelings, his frame of mind. And because Jesus was acquainted with grief, because He endured torments—to suffer as He suffered is a veritable joy to the soul filled with this holy love.

119. And this joy of love is far superior to all other joys ; it is founded upon the immutable rock of truth ; no prosperity can blight it, no adversity can affect it ; all these things serve to make the union with God only closer and more solid. True union presupposes unity of sentiment ; perfect union is impossible between the joyous and the sad. God is the Infinite Joy, and only those who participate in His joy—this joy of love—can be made one with Him. By this joy love grows incessantly, and the soul's union with God becomes ever closer and more absolute.

CHAPTER XV

FEAR

Quis est homo formidolosus, et corde pavido? vadat, et revertatur in domum suam, ne pavere faciat corda fratrum suorum, sicut ipse timore perterritus est (What man is there that is fearful, and faint-hearted? let him go, and return to his house, lest he make the hearts of his brethren to fear, as he himself is possessed with fear).—DEUT. xx. 8.

120. THE human heart, as we have seen, oscillates constantly between four sentiments—desire (or hope), joy, fear, and grief. Attracted by the good things which offer themselves, it goes out after them, and is glad when it obtains them. At the sight of the evils which threaten it, it is afraid, and if it is overtaken by them it grieves. This passion, or instinctive tendency to fear the evil is as necessary as the desire for good; it acts as a safeguard, for, thanks to it, we escape many ills which might prove fatal to us. But, like the other passions of the human heart, fear requires to be regulated according to the dictates of reason, or, better still, to the teachings of religion. If the desire of natural blessings, of a voluntary satisfaction in earthly joys, robs all supernatural gifts of their flavour and cripples hope, so fear and sadness, if yielded to, stifle the holy aspirations of hope, and arrest the soul's upward flight towards virtue.

121. But which are the true evils, and in what measure should we fear them? To this question Nature and faith furnish very different replies. Faith tells us that the great evil—the only absolute evil, in fact—which we should dread and at all costs avoid, is sin; for the other

evils are merely relative, and the Divine Wisdom often permits them for our greater good.

Nature, on the contrary, does not understand the heinousness of sin, and does not therefore guard against it. It dreads only such things as are opposed to its own instincts ; it devotes itself, at no matter what cost, even at the expense of its soul's interests, to the avoidance of suffering, which is in its eyes the supreme evil. With what energy should we not, therefore, repress these fears and listen to the teachings of faith, shutting our ears to the voice of Nature. Fear contracts the heart, checks the soarings of love, and hinders ardent desires and vigorous resolves. Egotism is frequently the cause of fear, and fear in return develops egotism ; he who yields to it shuts himself up in himself, and does not perform his duty either to God or to his neighbour.

122. And the fearful soul does not quail before real evils only ; if it does not control its cowardice, it will end by being daunted by the smallest troubles. The efforts which are required for acting rightly, for undertaking some good work, terrify it ; the thought that it may encounter some rebuff, some humiliation, appals it ; and then, instead of setting courageously to work, it remains inert.

It is true that in the present condition of our nature we are weak and powerless ; effort is painful, good actions appear difficult to us. Created things are no longer our humble and docile servants, as was the case before the Fall ; instead of contributing to our happiness and facilitating the performance of duty, they either rear themselves up as obstacles in our path, or they strive to seduce us and lead us out of the right way. Amidst so many difficulties, both outward and inward, we are little likely to accomplish anything very fine, and our undertakings run a great risk of being extremely imperfect. But is this a reason for neglecting duty and taking refuge in cowardly idleness ?

We all have a task to perform here below. Whatever may be our temporal or spiritual poverty, we have our

place in the world, and we ought one day to have our place also in the land of the elect. Both here below and in Heaven above we ought to contribute to the harmony of the whole, and God has given to each one the means to fulfil his mission. Those who, through excessive fear, dispense themselves from their tasks, run counter to the Divine Plan ; they deprive their brethren of the good that they were called upon to do to them, and God does not receive the honour which He had a right to expect.

The simple and upright soul knows that God makes use of vile instruments for the accomplishment of His purposes, instruments of earth, which often leave their stains behind them. The perfection of God's work is indeed somewhat tarnished thereby, but in spite of this slight injury it is still admirable and Divine. The less the trace of self that the instrument leaves behind it, the more beautiful will be the work, and it is indeed greatly to be desired that God's instruments might be less imperfect. But if the Divine work does not shine forth with all the splendour which it might have worn, it exists, at any rate, and bears fruit. On the other hand, if the earthly tool, under colour of not wishing to spoil the work, had refused its assistance, the work would never have come into being, and these precious results could not have been obtained.

123. How dearly God loves the courageous soul that overcomes all obstacles for righteousness' sake ! and how highly it is esteemed also by men ! The fearful soul, on the other hand, is displeasing both to God and to man ; it is a burden to itself and to all about it. It infects them with its own terrors ; it lowers their courage, checks their endeavours ; or, even if they resist its baleful influence, it disconcerts them by refusing its aid or by rejecting all their advice.

But the chief injury is to itself. The imagination calls forth every kind of phantom, all sorts of painful possibilities ; it multiplies and exaggerates obstacles, and thus creates a thousand causes for panic. To hear these people

talk, one would think that the earth was overrun with ferocious beasts ready to devour them, or was bristling with rocky peaks which they were obliged to climb.

124. The best way to deal with fear is to trample it under foot. By looking a thing in the face, the absence of danger is quickly demonstrated; the nerves are calmed, the imagination quieted, the will strengthened, and reason recovers its ascendancy. Next time the effort required will be less, and fear will soon entirely disappear. Let us treat all our apprehensions in the same way, never stopping to consider the physical or moral misfortunes which might conceivably attack us. "Fear ye not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul," says Our Divine Lord (St. Matt. x. 28). Our sweet Saviour does not wish us to give way to fear, even when confronted with martyrdom—and why? Because all the hairs of our heads are numbered, and not one falls to the ground without Our Heavenly Father's permission. God knows all, God can do all, God loves you. Wherefore, then, do you fear, O men of little faith? "Be not therefore solicitous for to-morrow" (St. Matt. vi. 34), says Our Lord again. Happy they who understand and follow this counsel, which is one of the most useful, the most practical, in the whole Gospel. Happy they who cast all their cares into the Heart of God and go forward on the path of duty courageously and without fear.

CHAPTER XVI

SORROW

Vasa figuli probat fornax, et homines justos tentatio tribulationis (The furnace trieth the potter's vessels, and the trial of affliction just men).—Ecclus. xxvii. 6.

§ 1. *The Providential Purpose of Sorrow.*

125. The Creation was a labour of love. All good tends to communicate itself. God, the Being of infinite goodness, desired to diffuse some portion of His goodness abroad; infinitely rich, He willed to distribute of His riches; infinitely happy, to make others glad with His happiness. The creature, angelic and human, as it came forth from the hand of God, was loaded by Him with blessings; a sweet felicity, exempt from all sorrow, was the portion of Angels and men alike during the time of their probation. And in return God required of His creatures that they should love Him; He had loved them first with an entirely gratuitous love—*Ipse prior dilexit nos* (1 St. John iv. 10)—and justice and the Divine honour require that they should give back love for love.

But, alas! in the place of love and gratitude He receives from too many of his creatures nothing but ingratitude and sin. God's love is a devouring flame which must do its work; if it does not kindle in the creature's heart a fire of love that rejoices and beatifies it, it becomes the avenging element of His justice; and this justice takes the place of the love which was despised; blessings give place to chastisements. The rebel Angels were the first to make this sad experience, and then man, in his turn, and as a

consequence of sin, witnessed the death of happiness and the birth of sorrow. With the rebel Angels, as with the damned, the Divine justice finds itself confronted with hatred and obduracy. Far from accepting the expiation which the Divine honour requires, they set themselves against God in their pride and rebellion. So the suffering which they have brought upon themselves becomes a torture ; their rage and hatred are redoubled. But here upon earth man can still admit his sin, can detest it and bow to the chastisement ; and then the pain takes on quite another character. The sorrow becomes resigned and loving ; for the love which God's benefits failed to produce, sorrow causes to well up in the heart.

This, then, is the aim of sorrow : to retrieve God's honour, to punish sin, and to destroy all the corruptions which it engenders. Earthly fire purifies by consuming everything that is corruptible and freeing the incorruptible elements from the dross with which they were mingled. We build, as the Apostle tells us, on the foundation which is Christ—an edifice wherein are mingled together gold and silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and stubble ; and the fire shall try this structure, and show what there is in it of pure and lasting material. It is the fire of God's justice, the fire of sorrow, which produces this result. In Hell, in Purgatory, the avenging flames attack and devour all that bears any taint or stain of sin, but over that which is pure they have no power.

126. Sorrow, then, is the offspring of sin ; God, who might have included it in the Divine scheme from the outset, only allowed it to be introduced into the world in the train of sin.

Before the primal Fall man knew nothing of the tyranny of the passions ; he had nought but happiness to look for from the society of his fellows ; all creation was a source of joy to him and the cause of his lifting up his heart in gratitude to God.

But sin reversed the whole order of Nature. Before he can reap, man must now sow in labour and sorrow ; he must

eat bread in the sweat of his brow ; his roses are set about with thorns which tear the hands that would gather them. All created things seem to speak to us in their mute language, and to say : " To what use dost thou design to put me ? I am sent by our common Creator to try thee ; for either I am such that to find me on thy path must be a distress to thee, or if I should be useful, I compel thee to painful exertions ; and often I resist all thine efforts and subject thee to cruel privations."

And more poignant even than our outward troubles are our inward griefs : sorrows of the heart, torn by separations, by bereavements, by the spectacle of our brother's troubles ; sorrows of the soul, caused by our failures, our miseries, our defects, and our sins.

All these troubles are designed to repair or to correct the consequences of sin ; they are of destructive force, and this is what renders them so bitter. In the human soul, all soiled by original sin, exist selfish tendencies and wrong attachments which have been developed and strengthened by the individual faults. These form so many fetters, which bind and hinder the holy inclinations instilled into us by grace. The fire of suffering is designed to consume all these impurities ; God wishes to destroy within us all that is displeasing to His holy eyes, and from the ashes of our defects to produce the most magnificent virtues.

127. And therefore it is that sorrow is so often lively and penetrating in the soul that is filled with imperfections, but ever striving to purify itself. It is like a great pyre whereon many faggots are consumed, out of the ashes of which some few pieces of gold may be recovered at the last. The process of burning all this wood is a lengthy one, and as the faggots are still green the wood moans, as it were, and writhes and pours out great volumes of smoke, resisting the flames as long as possible. And imperfect souls have so many affections for worldly things, so many attachments of the will, of the judgment, such a developed self-love, that all which tends to the destruction

of these faults, even the least privation, contradiction or humiliation, seems exceedingly painful to them. And their suffering endures so long as they have not made any real progress in renunciation. These sorrows are necessary for the imperfect soul; physical suffering will have the happy effect of destroying its sensuality; the loss or diminution of property will cure its avarice; contempt, criticisms or calumnies will break down its pride; the neglect or indifference of its neighbours will purge away its egotism. But when the soul is pure and detached, full of love for God, and disposed to accept everything from His hands, nearly all those things which formerly caused it distress will leave it indifferent; its griefs become less keen; the consuming fire scarcely finds any material to work on; and, encountering only dry or half-burnt wood, it achieves its task easily and noiselessly. This is not to say that the purified soul is exempt from all sorrows, but the causes are usually higher. Thus it suffers because of its offences against God. And to these pains is joined a peace which is full of sweetness, a complete resignation which alleviates and even gives savour to its sufferings.

§ 2. *The Benefits of Sorrow.*

128. Thus God's purpose in sending sorrow to men is attained, and they can derive from it, if they will, inestimable advantages.

If we strike a flint sharply, it emits a spark that kindles a fire which illuminates and burns. So the soul, smitten by suffering, sends forth a spark of love from which a great conflagration may proceed. But the stone's spark shines before burning, and so before kindling the fire of love in the soul, sorrow will have produced its light.

It begins by enlightening the person stricken, making him known to himself and to others, showing him his weaknesses and his virtues. First he learns to know his defects: he realizes that his own self-love or his own will is the cause

of his suffering. He comes to understand that a soul filled with the Divine love would remain indifferent where he weeps, or would, at any rate, make very little of these bodily sufferings or contradictions, of the reproaches or injustices which move him so profoundly.

If his virtues are deep and solid, it is sorrow that has taught him. "What doth he know that hath not been tried?" (Ecclus. xxxiv. 9). Is the man who has never suffered strong and valiant? Who can say? His laborious activity may be nothing but a need of his ardent nature; he spends himself, he devotes himself, but the moderation of his ardour would be an impossibility to him. When trials overtake him, when sickness seizes upon him, when his limbs are racked with pain, his desire for action straightway ceases. He cannot now spend himself without great efforts, and if he perseveres in his labours the strength of his soul becomes beyond question: thus is sorrow the touchstone of virtue.

129. Sorrow is, above all, the touchstone of humility. It is sweet to labour for God's glory, to spend oneself in order to gain souls for Him—to make Him better known and loved; this is, indeed, a happiness to the generous Christian. But if he should fail in these holy enterprises whilst others succeed, how will he accept the humiliation of the failure? how will he regard his neighbour's success? If he seek God alone, what signifies it to him by whom God is glorified or served? When Eldad and Medad broke forth into prophecies, a young man ran and told it to Moses, and Josue cried out to Moses to forbid them. "Why hast thou emulation for me?" he answered. "Oh, that all the people might prophesy, and that the Lord would give them His spirit!" (Num. xi. 29). St. Paul, when in prison, could no longer preach the Gospel, and some of the brethren, being envious and addicted to wrangling, betook themselves to preaching, thinking that their successes would arouse the jealousy of the prisoner of the Lord and add to the affliction of his chains. What then?

"So that, by all means, whether by occasion or by truth, Christ be preached; in this also I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice," exclaims the Apostle (Phil. i. 18). And if the trial does not draw sincere professions of disinterestedness from us also, it becomes clear that even in the good that we do we seek our own personal satisfaction, side by side with God's glory.

If we encounter contradictions in our undertakings, if our methods are blamed, if the correctness of our aims, the prudence of our decisions, are disputed, if the work which we have begun is taken from us and entrusted to another, the manner in which we accept these humiliations tests the purity of our intentions.

And so with all the virtues—gentleness, love for our neighbour—the ordeal proves whether these are sincere and perfect; it teaches us to know ourselves better and also to know God more perfectly. By trials borne in a right spirit we acquire a juster conception of that holiness which exacts such severe purgations even in the apparently purest of souls; of that unfathomable wisdom, the ways of which are so different from our ways; of that power which is able to bring good out of evil; of that love which is seen even in His chastisements: *Quos amo castigo* (Whom the Lord loveth He chastiseth—Heb. xii. 6), and which knows how to join peace and consolation to the hardest trials.

130. Again, tribulation enlightens the sincere soul; it reveals the evil that lay hidden in the recesses of the heart; but it does more than merely reveal it—it attacks it and destroys it, if only we know how to profit by its beneficent action.

Sorrow makes us better by humbling us. It gives us a lively consciousness of our impotence and our nothingness. A wounded man who is powerless to raise himself from the ground implores help of every passer-by, and no longer relies on his own strength. So he who is struck down by suffering abases himself, and seeks for aid and succour even from his inferiors, even from those for whom he has no affection.

If, as often happens, human aid is powerless to console us we turn to God, and send up our earnest and humble prayers to Him. How often has not sorrow been the means of bringing back to God those whom prosperity has estranged from Him! That, indeed, is a happy suffering which leads the prodigal son to his father's house again.

131. And if sorrow has converted many sinners, it has sanctified a still larger number of pious souls: these souls seem scarcely able to arrive at perfection save by this way of sorrow. They thereby first purify themselves from all stains, all imperfections, all that is not supernatural in their works. We harbour many selfish preoccupations of which we perhaps have no suspicion, but which become manifest under the stress of separations, failures, contradictions; and we are thus given an excellent opportunity of disowning such blemishes, of casting them behind us and joyfully and lovingly accepting the Divine will. "Yes, my God, in permitting this separation, this failure, these criticisms, Thou hast willed to deprive me of those human joys which were mingled with the happiness of working for Thee; only the satisfaction of having acted aright, and having sought to please Thee remains. The natural consolations which I should otherwise have found in success, in the encouragement and esteem of those about me, Thou hast taken away, and the pain that I experience shows me how much I held to them; but from to-day I renounce them joyfully, and am glad to have no recompense other than that of pleasing Thee." These acts of true love are so pleasing to God that He even permits works, excellent in themselves, to fail, in order to excite them. By this means we can become purer and holier, and this is what God desires before all things. He wills to be glorified by our virtues rather than by our works, by our humility and our love rather than by the most brilliant exterior successes.

And how many other acts of virtue can this suffering not produce? Faith is illumined, hope becomes ardent

and unshakable, love is strengthened and increased. Under the stress of sorrow, acts of these three theological virtues proceed spontaneously from the faithful soul ; and how many other virtues follow them ! Patience, renunciation, meekness, so beautiful and so pleasing to God, come naturally into play, and add greatly to the already acquired merits.

Without this suffering sent by Divine Providence, who would be sufficiently courageous to stretch out his own hands for the steel and the fire which must prune and consume all those imperfect attachments, those ties which enchain the soul and hinder its flight towards the pure heights of perfection ?

CHAPTER XVII

HOW TO MAKE A GOOD USE OF SORROW

Si commortui sumus, et convivemus : si sustinebimus, et conregnabimus (For if we be dead with Him, we shall live also with Him : if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him).—2 TIM. ii. 11, 12.

§ 1. *How in the Midst of Suffering we should practise Resignation.*

132. SORROW only accomplishes its providential work in souls that know how to regulate this passion and to make the best use of its pains. Sorrow bears within it the germs of death, as of life ; it may work our advancement or our destruction, according to the use that we make of it.

Misfortune may arouse anger or it may give an opportunity for an exercise of the virtues of patience. We have explained how God has put into our souls and into all the inferior creatures, a sort of powerful automatic spring, which comes into action as soon as any obstacle opposes itself to the acquisition of the good which attracts us, or when any evil menaces us. This is the irascible appetite, which violently repels the evil or the obstacle to the coveted good—an instinctive and blind power which does not wait for the reason to pronounce judgment before taking action.

This power already existed with our first parents before the Fall, for its utility is great ; but it was then in perfect submission to the reason, of which it was the devoted assistant and obedient servant. But with sin all was changed, and if generous and persevering efforts and, more especially, powerful graces, the result of ardent prayer, have not

mastered this irascible force, the least trouble produces a movement of impatience or anger, which is a fault and one that always injures the soul.

In children, before they are illumined by reason or formed by education, these instinctive movements of impatience or anger can be studied, and we see how inordinate they are, and how unworthy of a rational being who is subject to God. Deprive a child of his toy, and he stamps and cries and fixes eager eyes upon the object which has been taken from him. He seems to be beside himself, and to live only in that insignificant trifle which has captivated him. And, alas! are we wiser in our impatience? When some object that we cling to is taken away, whether it be health, riches, or the world's esteem, might it not be thought, at the sight of our impatience, our sullen anger, or at least our grief and depression, that our souls were bound up with this thing, and that we could not live without it?

When a man who does not know how to control and regulate his troubles falls ill, he can think of nothing but his lost health. He dwells upon the pleasures which he might have enjoyed, the gratifications which he might have procured for himself. He counts up all the discomforts, all the disagreeables, all the pains of his illness; and these ceaseless calculations, these sterile regrets, occupy him to the point of blinding him entirely to much more useful things; absorbed in his sorrows, he will neglect his actual duties. And if the disorder lasts, we see a ruined life, it may be a soul desperate, past recovery.

133. God could doubtless disperse these gloomy sorrows and cause peace to reign in the soul, appeasing all its longings, and thereby lessening the pains which these disappointments have caused. To desire nothing is to be afflicted by nothing. God has at times vouchsafed this grace to heroic souls in recompense for their long and bitter sacrifices; and without experiencing a total cessation of suffering, those generous souls who have sustained a prolonged conflict

find their inferior inclinations diminishing in strength, and with them their sufferings.

When our troubles are caused by natural and imperfect attachments, we must renounce them sincerely, thanking God for aiding us in this difficult and necessary work of detachment.

But our sorrow may have nothing reprehensible about it, for even with perfect souls occasions for suffering still continue. Persons for whom we feel a perfectly legitimate affection may be taken from us ; objects of great value to us may be removed ; very real evils may overtake us. As the heart's yearnings after a lost and beloved object are the result of an affection which was willed by God, the sorrow is legitimate ; but we must enter, none the less, into the Divine designs for the punishment of sin or for our advancement in holiness.

134. How then shall we regulate and moderate our sorrow so that it does not become harmful ? Obviously by an act of resignation, of submission to the Divine Will, which should replace in our hearts the sadness which the trials have caused. *And this act will only be sincere and perfect if we begin by banishing, as far as possible, the recollection of the cause of our pain from the memory.* If we give a loose rein to our thoughts, allowing them to turn, whenever they feel so disposed, towards the beloved object of which we have been deprived, or the ill which afflicts us, our sorrow will go on increasing ; it will impose its full burden upon our hearts, crushing them to the earth. Every fresh glance will increase our affection ; our heart's attraction towards it, always strong, will become almost irresistible ; and since the sorrow consequent upon our loss is nothing else than this same attraction thwarted, it becomes as dominant and irresistible as the original attraction itself. He who lends himself to the encroaching action of sorrow, who allows himself to be overmastered by it, loses, by his own fault, a part of his liberty ; he becomes, as it were, fettered, paralysed by his grief ; he has no longer the

same energy of action as before. And this torpor of the soul is also produced in those who dwell too much upon their defects and sins, or they think of them without at the same time recalling, as we should always do, the thought of the Divine goodness and compassion. Ever occupied with themselves and not enough with God, they are incessantly reviewing the saddening spectacle of their own sins and shortcomings ; like those vain women who, having some blemish on the face, are for ever running to the looking-glass to see if the place is healing, making themselves wretched in the meantime because of the disfigurement.

135. Ought we to seek distraction, then, in our sorrow, yielding to new attractions, as substitutes for those which we have lost, seeking human consolations, and replacing with other objects or persons those which have been taken from us ?

This method of alleviating our sorrow is certainly not the best, and it often goes counter to God's designs. What is His intention when He deprives us of earthly possessions, when He separates us from those whom we love ? It is to detach us from the creature in order to unite us more closely to Himself. If, as soon as He severs the bands which hinder our flight towards Him, we at once forge ourselves other chains, do we not become our own enemies ?

There is always some merciful design of Providence in the trials that befall us. Our short-sighted human wisdom may, indeed, fancy that they are about to hinder all the blessings, all the happy results which we were anticipating. The illness which chains us to our sick-bed may seem the ruin of all our fine projects ; but God's designs are not ours. His intention in our illness is our sanctification, and if we accept it as He desires, it will bring forth marvellous fruits in our souls. If, on the other hand, the sick man abandons himself to vain regrets over his lost health, if he strives to console himself by means of carefully fostered illusions, if he even persists in maintaining his

life of activity, informing himself eagerly of all that appertains to it, occupying himself with calculations, looking ahead, criticizing, living an exterior life, and failing to take advantage, for his sanctification, of the solitude to which his sickness condemns him, he is opposing obstacles in the way of God's designs. God was proposing to destroy the too human eagerness and activity by which the best actions of this faithful Christian were spoiled so long as his good health continued. God wills the death within him of all that is imperfect, all that is personal, so that the devoted servant may forget himself and work with a pure intention for his Master's glory. In the generous renunciation of his tastes, the loving acceptance of the uselessness, the prostration of his sickness, he will come to the state where he no longer desires action unless it is God's will, and then only as much and in the manner that God desires.

When the Christian's will is purified by this absolute resignation all that he does is blessed by God ; and although his work should have no apparent success, the hidden results will be very good. And yet more ; his sufferings are no less fruitful than his works, and on his bed of sickness he cannot fail to be as useful to the Church as the most active of workmen, the most zealous of apostles.

§ 2. *Sorrow and the Divine Perfections.*

136. When we have once grasped the part which suffering occupies in the Divine plan, it becomes easy to sanctify our trials. "Who will grant that my request may come, and that God may give me what I look for?" says holy Job ; "and that He that hath begun may destroy me, that He may loose His hand and cut me off? And that this may be my comfort, that afflicting me with sorrow, He spare not, nor I contradict the words of the Holy One" (Job vi. 8-10). Let God, then, satisfy His justice, let Him content His holiness, let Him put forth His power, and let His very goodness be free to plunge me

into suffering and cause me to gather unto myself all its inestimable fruits.

The sorrows of the human creature are ordered by the Divine attributes, and the designs of the Eternal Wisdom are furthered thereby. In the face of the appalling spectacle of sin, the insolent revolt of the creature formed out of the dust of the earth against its Creator's infinite majesty, God's incorruptible Justice claims an expiation. It cannot renounce its rights ; God would be God no longer did He not chastise sin. Job, like all those the holiness of whose lives has won them great illumination, understood the justice of the Divine sentence by which the sinner is condemned to suffering. Like all perfect souls, he was conscious of a lively desire to pay his debts to this Divine justice. The same illuminations of grace also showed him all the purity which the God of infinite holiness requires of His friends, and he desired, therefore, to be purified by suffering. He knew, too, that the uncreated Wisdom reaches its goal by ways unlike the ways of man—that it leads us to happiness through suffering. He knew that an infinitely powerful, infinitely good God could and would endow him thus with the most precious blessings. How, then, could he fail to ask God to carry out his designs to the end and to accomplish His work, bitter, doubtless, but also all-salutary, within him ? And this just man dreads lest he should thwart God's decrees ; for if the Divine designs are wisdom and goodness, man, alas ! can bring them to nought, or, at least, he can hinder their complete realization ; and so Job longs and prays that he may oppose no obstacle to God's designs regarding him.

137. And God will be well pleased, He will be glorified. What matter, then, if I groan ? What matter if a pitiful creature suffer, provided this great God be glorified ? What matter that nothingness be crushed, if the Almighty will be done ? Are not the grains of incense burnt and destroyed in order that a sweet fragrance may be diffused in the holy place, to rejoice the hearts of the faithful and to do God honour ?

We are those grains of incense, and we ought to count ourselves happy if, by our sufferings, borne with a holy resignation, we can send up a sweet odour to the Throne above.

138. These are the thoughts to which we should have recourse when sorrow oppresses us, instead of reviewing in our minds the causes of our grief, instead of tearing open again the wounds which Time would fain heal. The man who would constantly tamper with a wound, rending apart the re-forming tissues, would be a maniac ; but they are no less senseless who are perpetually recalling to mind the grounds of their distress, their brothers' offences against them, the acts of injustice of which they fancy themselves the victims, or the trials with which Providence has afflicted them. We ought rather to humble ourselves and realize that our sufferings fall far short of our deserts—we who, if we came to die, should be obliged to expiate our faults by a rigorous purgatory. And since we deserve the fire for our portion, why do we complain ? Our poor souls, soiled with sin, with attachment to self, with imperfections of all kinds, have great need to be purified by suffering, in order that they may become pleasing in the eyes of an infinitely holy God. It is as though we were covered with some disfiguring disease, of which we could not be cured without acute pain. It is this thought which makes humble souls the most patient, while a lack of resignation is always a sign of secret pride.

139. God is just when He proves us, but His goodness shines out more conspicuously than His justice, because He wills that this suffering, which cleanses and purifies our souls, should add to their beauty, and make them more meritorious. The trial passes, the merit remains ; many other trials have passed which we have forgotten, but God does not forget, and He will give us our reward. *Momentaneum et leve tribulationis nostræ æternum gloriæ pondus operatur in nobis* (For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory—2 Cor. iv. 17).

Our sufferings are indeed transitory and light, but on that great day when our lot shall be decided, each one of them will produce a weight of glory which shall endure for evermore.

Yes, God is holy and just ; God is good when He thus proves us. If we lift our eyes to Him in our affliction, there will arise from our hearts a generous *fiat* which will be a very perfect act of love. The passing effort may perhaps have but a temporary effect ; the thought of our sorrows will possibly pursue us in spite of ourselves ; the grief that our resignation diverted for an instant, endeavours to find its way back into our hearts, but each fresh effort will produce a fresh act of submission. Directing our gaze once more upon God's grandeur, His perfections, His holiness, His infinite goodness, another cry of love will escape us. And every time that we win a like victory over Nature—a hundred times a day, it may be—so often shall we take another step forward on the path of perfection and love.

§ 3. *The Example of Jesus.*

140. But God is very high above us ; He so surpasses our feeble conceptions that not to everyone is it given to be smitten with His grandeur, to acquire a knowledge of His attributes. To attain to an idea of the Divinity which smites and crushes, while it consoles and comforts us, is a most signal grace. Those who have received no very bright illumination of faith are not greatly touched with God's perfections, or only temporarily so. They have but an imperfect understanding of the exigencies of His justice and holiness ; how, then, in the thought of His splendour should they find any consolation in their griefs ? But is there no way by which this mighty God can descend within the ken of this frail humanity ? Is there no sure and easy path by which we may attain to Him ? Listen to Our Lord's voice : *Ego sum via !* (I am the Way ! No man cometh to the Father but by Me !) *Qui videt me videt*

et Patrem ! (He that seeth Me seeth the Father also !) Let us contemplate Jesus, therefore ; let us learn to know Him, to form a correct idea of His interior dispositions, His knowledge and His admirable wisdom, the immense power of the love of His Sacred Heart. Let us love to meditate upon Him, to follow Him in His mysteries, in His lowly birth, His humble and already persecuted infancy, His laborious youth, the fatigues of His public ministry, in His Passion, in His Eucharist, where He is so often unknown and outraged. He, the Son of the Omnipotent God ; He, the Eternal Word, made Flesh for our sakes ; let us see what He has endured, with what disposition of soul He has suffered. We shall then no longer be astonished at our own troubles, but shall understand all the glory to God of which they may be the occasion, all the profit which they will bring to our own souls.

When some trial befalls us let us say : " This is but the slightest prick from the crown of thorns, but the faintest stripe from the rods of the flagellation." Our worst humiliations are the least possible participations in the affronts and ignominies of Jesus Christ.

141. What a Teacher of patience is our sweet Lord ! and what a science of sublime resignation can we not learn in His school ! " Blessed are they that suffer," He says ; " blessed are they that mourn " (St. Matt. v. 5, 10). So also : " You now indeed have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice ; and your joy no man shall take from you " (St. John xvi. 22). " Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in Heaven " (St. Matt. v. 12).

142. O most consoling words ! But still more consoling is His example. Those who have learned from Him to bear suffering will see in each trial the munificent hand of God. They rejoice in being like Jesus ; they know that he who is conformed to the likeness of the Son of God has become, with Him, the object of the Eternal Father's complacency ; and the nearer the likeness to the Divine Son, the dearer always to the Heart of God.

The action of the Holy Ghost in our hearts tends to this end—to make us, in St. Paul's words, conformable to the image of Christ (Rom. viii. 29), the perfect model, the sublime example which we are bound to reproduce, in so far as in us lies. He is the Vine, we are the branches ; He is the Head, we are the members ; and His perfections, His dispositions, must be found in us also. He has practised love, adoration, satisfaction, conformity to His Father's will to a sublime degree ; and our Divine Chief wishes to see these same virtues reproduced in some measure in our souls. They were made manifest in the God-Man through tribulation ; they will be brought forth also in us by the same means.

143. And we must also study Jesus, seeking what we can imitate in Him. Behold His hands nailed to the cross ! Let us each ask of ourselves : " What are the nails by which my hands must be pierced ? Where is that cross which is to hold them fast ? My cross is my duty—the duties of my state, to which the Divine will has chosen to bind me. The nails which shall pierce my hands, the wounds which shall tear my flesh, are the difficulties which I shall encounter in the performance of these tasks, the obstacles which, by redoubling my efforts, I must overcome : the incidents which will interfere with my repose, the necessities which will hold me back when my tastes call me elsewhere. Or it may be that inaction is my cross ; sickness, helplessness, or persecution, by which all active work is prohibited, are the nails binding me to the tree."

When God wishes us to spend ourselves, to apply ourselves to some heavy task, we can turn our eyes to Jesus in His labour at Nazareth, or, again, in His public ministry, pursuing with His love the lost sheep. When work is prohibited, we may see Jesus in prayer, when He had sent out His Apostles to preach and to work miracles. In moments of failure we can contemplate Jesus dying, forsaken, denied by His Apostles, leaving to them the honour of founding His Church and propagating it throughout the world.

With His death His work was apparently overthrown ; no failure could have seemed more complete ; but in His humiliation, His acceptance of the ignominies of the Passion, the scoffs of His enemies who exulted in their triumph, He was all the time meriting and preparing the future successes of His Apostles.

Jesus willed to pass through every kind of trial in order that in our troubles we should find those special graces which He merited for us, and that we might be sustained by His example.

When a soul has suffered many things, treading always in Our Lord's footprints, it has thereby become purified from its stains, and enriched with every kind of virtue ; it then becomes like unto its Divine Model. Jesus comes in to it ; He unites Himself to it in a close union, and it can say in all truth : " I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me " (Gal. ii. 20).

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LOVE OF GOD, AND HOW WE MAY INCREASE IT

Deus caritas est : qui manet in caritate, in Deo manet et Deus in eo (God is charity : and he that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him).—1 St. John iv. 16.

§ 1. *Charity in its Connection with the Other Virtues.*

144. Charity is the queen of virtues. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and first commandment*, said Our Lord (St. Matt. xxii. 37, 38). Without this, all other virtues and all gifts are valueless before God. *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal*, says St. Paul. *And if I should have prophecy and should know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing* (1 Cor. xiii. 1-3). *And now there remain faith, hope, and charity, these three great virtues, but the greatest of these is charity.* The others pass away, faith and hope can find no place in Heaven, but *charity never falleth away.* Charity will endure, far more beautiful than upon this earth, where so many obstacles hinder it, so many imperfections corrupt it, where so many occupations break in upon its exercise. In Heaven it will be untrammelled, perfect, uninterrupted.

145. But if our charity is unfettered in Heaven, the measure of it will be exactly that to which it has attained

on earth. A giant and a child, when bound hand and foot, are equally unable to put forth their whole strength. They can, by struggling, produce certain effects, and the giant will soon show which is the stronger of the two. If their bonds are severed, neither will have acquired fresh power, but each is now at liberty to make a full use of all that he possesses. So when we are in Heaven the shackles by which our love was restrained will have vanished. We shall love God with all our strength, but our love will not have increased ; its growth will have been arrested at the moment of death ; such as it is at that supreme moment, such will it remain for all eternity. And as upon this earth there are Christians who are, in a sort, giants of love, and also very many more whose charity is less ardent, so will it be in Heaven. Each will love to his full capacity, and will have the complete enjoyment of this love ; but the capacity and the enjoyment will vary with every one of the elect.

146. If the other theological virtues have not the sovereign importance of charity, they prepare the way for it, and dispose the heart to practise it. The greater their perfection, the more perfect is the love. The fervent soul has watched carefully over its intelligence ; it has cut off all vain thoughts, and nourished it upon the great truths of religion, and God in His turn has clearly enlightened it. At the same time, it has mortified the tendencies of the heart ; it no longer desires natural blessings for their own sakes ; it does not give itself up to human joys ; it knows no fear but that of offending God, nor does it allow itself to be numbed by sadness. So the heart is free ; it takes its untrammelled flight towards God, whom it desires as its supreme good. This is hope, ardent and perfect.

But God, who designs to be Himself the happiness of the faithful soul, wills to be not its good only, but its absolute good, worthy of all admiration, of all esteem. The faithful soul, enlightened by its vivid faith, and already borne towards God by a powerful impulse of hope, delights

in the thought of His infinite splendour, His beauty, and His love ; it finds an endless satisfaction in the contemplation of this sublime Being, and is ravished with joy. It yearns again to be united to Him, not for its own advantage, but by the inevitable need, the instinctive tendency of its love towards a God who is so good, so lovely, so ravishing. It wishes Him every sort of good ; it rejoices in the happiness which He possesses ; it is solicitous to avoid causing Him any displeasure and, on the other hand, to please Him, at no matter what cost to itself. Nor does it content itself with barren aspirations ; it orders its conduct in conformity with its sentiments.

This is true love—love pure from all alloy. But this love is seldom found alone ; it is more often seen united to other sentiments of a less high order, such as fear of chastisement, or the desire of eternal happiness. But the one does not hurt the other, and each has its own merit if each is sufficient to elicit from the will a sincere determination to do good and to avoid evil.

§ 2. *The Scope of Charity.*

147. St. Paul wished that the Ephesians should understand the length and breadth and height of God's goodness and love towards men. And the love of man towards God—this fire of charity that is to be found in every heart which is in a state of grace—has it also its dimensions ? What is its length and depth and height ? Is it a mere tongue of flame, is it a glowing hearth, or is it an immense furnace ?

Its breadth will depend upon the extent of the good that the man desires to embrace. If he contents himself with performing the bare essentials of his duty and avoiding such things as would lead to a complete rupture with God, then his love is truly narrow. If he wishes to eschew every deliberate venial sin, his charity is broader ; if he wishes to accomplish works of supererogation for God's

sake, and particularly such as are painful to Nature, it is still further amplified. And, finally, it is of great breadth if in order to honour and please God he has decided to refuse Him nothing, and from amongst a number of legitimate things always to choose the most perfect.

The length of love depends on the firmness and intensity of the will in the pursuit of good. The love which is produced by a weak and yielding will can never go very far ; it stops short before the least difficulties ; but if it proceeds from an energetic will, it surmounts all obstacles, its influence is extended over many actions.

The height of love depends upon the greatness of our esteem for God and the influence which this esteem exercises over our various actions. Even ordinary souls can understand that God is to be preferred above all creatures ; but their esteem and their desire not to displease this estimable Being are not strong enough to decide them to renounce sin ; they are obliged to combine the motive of their own interest with the fear of punishment. More advanced souls, those who possess a higher knowledge of God, also desire to avoid Hell and to win an eternity of bliss. For these reasons they will eschew evil at all costs ; but they wish purely to please God, and not to offend One so worthy of all love. For these reasons, also, they are sincerely resolved not to sin. And as their knowledge and admiration of God increase, the higher their love becomes, and in the case of those holy souls whose enlightened faith gives them a very exalted idea of God, it attains to a sublime height.

§ 3. *God's Love the Model for Our Own.*

148. As love increases within us, the more pleasing do we become in God's sight ; love embellishes the soul above any other virtue, because, more than any other, it makes it like unto Him.

God is love. *Deus caritas est*, says St. John. " Thou

callest me thy great God, thy Master and thy Lord," said Jesus once to one of His mystic spouses, " and thou sayest well, for such indeed I am ; but I am also charity. Love is My name, and thus I desire thee henceforth to call Me. I am given many names by men, but there is none that pleases Me more and expresses what I am towards them more than this." [1]

God the Father, in His contemplation of the Son by whose sovereign beauty He is ravished, brings forth, as it were, an infinite flood of love and joy ; and the Son, contemplating the supreme beauty of the Father, gives back this flood of love and joy which passes from the One to the Other, but is one ; for it is the same Will, common to the Father and the Son, which produces this love, and it is the one goodness, common to the Father and to the Son, which is the object of this love. And this breath of love, this flood of love, which is the Holy Ghost, is the all-perfect Bond of the Blessed Trinity. The three Divine Persons are thus united in love and by love. Love is their nourishment and their life.

It was love, too, which decided the Almighty to communicate His blessings to the creature ; by love He created the Angels and men ; by love He offers them the most precious gifts ; by love He sanctifies and glorifies those who accept these gifts. We might say that in God there is but one single act whose true name is Love. By the same solar heat clay is hardened and dried, and wax is softened. The same fire which warms us and makes our food more palatable can consume and destroy our most precious possessions. The cause remains the same, but the results vary according to circumstances and the different dispositions of the materials subjected to its action. Love causes a luminous and burning effluence to issue forth from the Heart of God, and the natural results of this emanation are happiness and health ; finding nothing that is opposed

[1] *Vie de la Ven. Marie de l'Incarnation, Ursuline,* by the Abbé Chapot, part i., chap. iv.

to it in the just man's heart, it sanctifies it and brings it happiness. In the repentant sinner it finds good dispositions and likewise stains which must be consumed; it is productive at the same time of sorrow and of joy. But in the heart of the reprobate, meeting with an obstinate resistance, it causes torture of a poignancy in proportion to the vigour of the opposition offered, the strength of the hatred, and the vastness of the rebellion.

In God, to whom no one is necessary, love is wholly disinterested; but it tends towards union because He desires that we should be made one with Him. It is not a love of pure compassion, like that of the rich man for the beggar, but a love of friendship which God bears towards us. The love of desire yearns after union, because it wishes to possess something which would prove useful to it. Disinterested love, when it is the love of friendship, desires the union of affection; it wishes to be one with the beloved object, to share its most private sentiments, its deepest secrets, its most precious possessions.

Such is God's love for us, and we must pay love back to Him again, a love that should be modelled upon His love. It is true that with us, needing God as we do, the love of desire is legitimate, and He will not fail to approve us when we seek our happiness in Him. But when, forgetful of ourselves, we are taken captive by His beauty, absorbed in admiration for the Divine attributes, when we go out after Him by pure affection, this act of true love is much more pleasing to Him.

§ 4. *The Elements of Love.*

149. Love comprises two distinct sentiments, both of which are necessary—the sentiment of complaisance, and the sentiment of benevolence. The qualities that we see in the person loved charm us: this is complaisance; we wish well to this person, and that is benevolence. To produce these sentiments in the heart is to practise affective

love, and it is especially in prayer that effective love towards God is exercised and becomes strengthened.

Affective love would not be sincere if it were not accompanied by effective love, which produces works, and by means of which we serve God. Is that sincere love which professes to wish well to someone while refusing to attempt to put this good-will into practice? Pilate, in the presence of Jesus, esteemed Him, admired Him, and wished Him well; but his conduct gave the lie to these fine feelings, or, rather, it proved that his good-will was not real. He had the feeble wish, but not the sincere will, to save the Just One. Our virtues should prove the reality of our inner sentiments, and be an indication of their exact strength. To attempt to judge the strength of our love by our emotions would be to expose ourselves to certain illusion. The sacrifice of our own will and a loving and entire acceptance of the Divine Will, showing itself in the countless occasions which our daily life affords—this is the proof of perfect love. If perfect love cannot come into being, or grow without prayer and without the constant practice of affective love, neither can it develop without works, without a generous war against our defects, without fidelity to the Christian virtues.

§ 5. *Perfect Love.*

150. Perfect love! What does this expression signify? Strictly speaking, it might only imply a passing act of perfect charity which would be merely the sincere resolve to avoid every mortal sin because it wounds a God who is infinitely good and worthy of all love. This disposition is sufficient to obtain forgiveness of grave sins, and to restore the soul to a state of grace, but this is not the sense in which we have employed the expression " perfect love "; neither is it that uninterrupted, unflagging love which can exist only in Heaven.

A soul has arrived at perfect love here below when it is

in habitual dispositions to renounce everything that could cool the ardour of its charity, when it, consequently, has no voluntary attachment either to light faults or imperfections, when it proposes to accomplish in all things only what God wills and as He wills it ; when this resolution is not the fruit of an enthusiastic exaltation, for which the imagination and the sensibility have been chiefly responsible, but when it is a calm, and therefore a constant determination of the will, which knows all the difficulties and obstacles, and is able to surmount them.

Perfect love supposes a highly developed love of complaisance, and those only attain to it who are taken captive by God's beauty, who feel for Him the most ardent esteem and the liveliest admiration. And it is not only at long intervals that their thoughts turn towards Him. Could we call that love perfect where entire hours are passed in forgetfulness of God ? Perfect love, then, supposes an affective love, both ardent and frequent ; for it supposes (as we have just said) an effective love, generous, habitual, and, we may add, delicate. It argues a gross and scarcely disinterested love if a man cannot perform any work, or render any service for his friend without showing how much the effort costs him. True love never thinks it can do enough for its beloved. Fatigues and difficulties are absolutely ignored ; it seldom speaks of its sacrifices, and if it does so at all, it is merely to protest that they were nothing, and that it is ready to accomplish others far greater.

§ 6. *The Progress of Love.*

151. The extent of the supernatural virtues is incommensurable ; we may make long progress in them without reaching their limit. It is thus with faith and hope, but especially with charity, which has no possible bounds because, as St. Augustine has said, the measure of the love of God is to love Him without measure. The degrees of love are innumerable. We meet many souls of a sincere

piety who, during the course of a long life, have made a daily progress in charity without ever attaining to its perfection. And yet how many prayers, how many pious exercises, how many acts of virtue—all of which have tended to the growth of charity within them—have they not performed. Others, who at an early period of their lives have attained to perfect charity, go on ever advancing ; their progress is much more rapid ; their least acts, having a very high value, are continually making large additions to their store of charity, and yet they never attain to the heroic charity of the Saints.

Spiritual writers like to compare our advance in virtue to the ascent of an exceedingly high mountain. In the lowest part, nearest to the plain, we are still liable to cold and gloomy fogs ; but the higher we go, the nearer we approach to the Divine Sun, the more we are inundated with His light and kindled by His warmth. But many paths present themselves to the travellers who wish to make the ascent. Some, which skirt the sides of the mountain, offer an easy gradient, and are shady and pleasant ; others, studded with thorny bushes, are much steeper and more difficult, because they lead directly to the summit. Amongst the travellers there are many who, disliking exertion, and being further loaded with heavy garments and luggage which they will not discard, choose the winding paths, giving the preference to those where the ascent is almost imperceptible. They proceed with great circumspection ; they travel for a long time, always ascending, but after many years have only reached a very small altitude. They go farther, however, than those who halt by the way, or who, when they have had a fall, are too cowardly to rise. Others, being ardent and intrepid, and free from anything that could retard their progress, select the steepest paths, and never pause. The higher they go, the more their strength increases : and thus they quickly attain to very great heights. These are perfect souls. Amongst these last are some who, being even

more courageous and more completely denuded of all impediments than the others, outstrip their fellows. And then, when they have arrived at a great height, a wonderful metamorphosis takes place in them. From their bare and bleeding shoulders spring forth wings, which at first merely help to sustain them, but, growing little by little, become powerful enough to support them. And henceforth they no longer walk or run—they fly, soaring to such heights that to the other travellers they appear to be rather in Heaven than on earth. These are those who attain to heroic love, and they are the Saints.

152. But we must now speak of the progress of love—a most grave and important subject, and one full of interest for our pious readers. As we have remarked, people love their love ; this is why the more love grows, the more it desires to grow. Those who are indifferent as to their spiritual progress are greatly to be pitied, and if they do not long to love God more it is because their love is weak and tepid. We hear them remark without any regret that their youthful fervour has cooled, that all their ideas have changed. They congratulate themselves upon being less naïve, upon having got rid of their early illusions. They are indeed to be commiserated. And if we pity those poor people whose physical growth has been arrested by some infirmity, and who, with a child's body, have a large head without any intellect, how much more should we compassionate these spiritual deformities in whom the growth of Divine charity has been checked, but who are quite satisfied with their condition. On the other hand, he who, however great his faults, is conscious of a sincere desire for progress, may conclude that he already loves God ; and as it is God who gives this love and who excites this desire in him, he must recognize that God also desires his advancement.

His progress depends upon God and upon himself—upon the graces which God may give him and his own fidelity to grace. We can reduce the means by which the holy

virtue of charity is augmented in the soul to three: the Sacraments, the practice of virtue, and prayer. By the Sacraments God operates more directly; He Himself pours charity into the hearts of the faithful. By the practice of virtue, love is strengthened and extended, the obstacles which may have hindered its development are destroyed, the will becomes more energetic and capable of a more intense love. By prayer God is better known; His Divine beauty exercises a more lively attraction; affectionate protestations are multiplied; a sweet familiarity becomes established between God and the faithful soul; and, thanks to these reciprocal communications, love becomes more intimate, sweeter, and more ardent.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SACRAMENTS

Haurietis aquas in gaudio de fontibus Salvatoris (You shall draw water with joy out of the Saviour's fountains).—Isa. xii. 3.

153. The Sacraments are an admirable creation of Divine love. Instituted for the purpose of instilling and augmenting grace within us, they accomplish their work in a manner at once mysterious and powerful. God makes use of sensible objects, adapting His operations to the needs of our nature. The soul—spiritual though it be—cannot dispense with the senses; without their aid it cannot attain to the highest knowledge; by their means it receives a thousand impulses, many of them evil; it seemed good, therefore, to the Divine Wisdom to communicate the most precious blessings by the same medium.

And so God raised the dignity of matter by making it serve wholly supernatural ends, and believers learn to esteem all the Divine works and to admire the Creator's wisdom and power. A few drops of water serve to purify the soul, even as they cleanse the body; the consecrated oils and balsams give us strength and light; the grains of wheat become the Body of Christ and the spiritual sustenance of Christians. And so this material nature, which since Adam's sin has shown itself so rebellious, and apparently capable of causing us nought but sorrow and labour, becomes something more than a mere occasion of trial to us. Lest we should be tempted to despise it, God, by turning it to such sacred uses, teaches us that nothing which issues forth from His hands is to be disdained; that

even in His least works the mark of their Divine origin is more or less manifest ; and, in spite of their imperfections, that they are all of great worth.

And men, our brethren, who are often an occasion of suffering to us, whom we are sometimes inclined to regard with contempt, we learn to esteem, to venerate and to love, when we see that God chooses from amongst them the ministers of His Sacraments, that He selects them as the channels of His inestimable blessings, that He makes the diffusion of His graces dependent upon their free-will, that He appoints them thus as His auxiliaries, and confers upon them the sublimest dignity.

This whole economy of grace is deeply mysterious ; our poor minds, which cannot even understand how the body, being material, can act upon the soul, which is spiritual, comprehend still less how these supernatural effects can be produced with the aid of matter. They will not see why objects such as holy water, which have been sanctified by the prayers of the Church, can be a source of torture to the devils, nor how the effusion of baptismal streams can efface the stains of original sin.[1] They will not understand, but they will see no impossibility ; they will believe in the power of God, who by the use of vile instruments obtains the most precious results ; they will adore the goodness of God, who by these Sacraments wills to enrich us with celestial treasures.

[1] Many theologians teach that the Sacraments act as the moral cause, just as the cheque or coupon acts on the banker, deciding him to pay out the sum specified on the paper. Others, again, see in the Sacraments the physical causes of the grace. We do not wish to take sides in this controversy, but, apart from the question of fact, we do not think it impossible that God should employ the Sacraments as the physical causes by which spiritual effects are produced. People need not be astonished, says St. Augustine, as quoted by St. Thomas (3 q. 62, A. 4, ad. 3), at our saying that water, a corporeal substance, attains to the soul for its purification. Yes, it does so attain, and it penetrates every crevice of the conscience. Already naturally subtle and light, by the blessing of Christ it becomes more subtle still, it goes down to the hidden sources of life, and with its delicate dew irrigates the most secret recesses of the soul.

154. All sincere Christians admit the efficacy of the Sacraments, but the more lively the faith the greater become our esteem and veneration for these means of salvation. In the Sacraments it is God that operates, God whose power is without bounds ; and He acts by putting within our reach the treasury of the merits of Jesus Christ —merits of infinite worth. Therefore it is that we are unable to understand all that a Sacrament may contain, the whole sum of the graces which God can communicate to saintly souls. The Angels and the elect are rapt in admiration at the sight of the Sacraments ; they are much more capable of perceiving all their beauties, they have a better understanding of their worth, because they are more illumined by the light of glory. And Christian souls form a higher and juster idea of the Sacraments, in proportion as they are enlightened by the revelations of grace.

155. The indifference which many Christians exhibit with regard to the Sacraments is truly deplorable. Jesus Christ, at the cost of His Blood and of His suffering, has purchased for men the most incomprehensible benefits. All Heaven marvels ; the blessed do not know how to extol His generosity sufficiently ; and mankind, to whom these treasures are offered, fails to take advantage of them. By the Sacraments we acquire grace ; each time that we receive them our sum of sanctifying grace is augmented, as is also the measure of our habitual charity, which keeps pace with the sanctifying grace and the felicity which we shall enjoy for all eternity.

How many seem to forget that the Sacraments are offered to them for the beautifying of their souls, for the sustenance and growth of Divine love in their hearts, and for the augmentation of the happiness which is laid up for them. Some receive them occasionally, and with insufficient preparation ; others resort to them more frequently ; but few so dispose themselves for their reception as to derive from them any very great fruits. True as it is that material comparisons are always inadequate to express facts of the

supernatural order, we will endeavour to illustrate our meaning.

156. Let us imagine a vast river, the waters of which are heavily charged with gold, the dwellers on its banks being free to come and draw from it as they please, the amount depending only upon the capacity of the vessels which they bring for this purpose. Some arrive armed merely with nutshells ; this small quantity is none the less valuable, and adds to their wealth ; but the greater number of these persons seldom take the trouble to go in search of the precious dust. Others, who come oftener, make use of a goblet, others of a bucket ; their burden is considerably greater, but it is also of far higher value. Others (but they are few), more laborious and intelligent, have provided themselves with huge casks laid upon heavy waggons. These are filled to the brim each time that they come to the river, and as they multiply these expeditions as much as possible, without shrinking from the exertion, how vast their treasure will be after so many years of labour !

The sun shines alike on all men ; it pours its light and heat upon the earth ; it illumines and warms the poor man's hut equally with the rich man's palace. But we must leave the way clear for its beams. The thick-walled dungeons and strongholds of the Middle Ages, which allowed no passage to the light save by narrow loopholes or airholes, were always dark and cold, while houses with large and numerous apertures and transparent glass conservatories are bright and warm as soon as the summer sun shines.

So we profit by the Sacraments according to the spirit of faith and love with which we approach them. All of us, whatever may be the height or the smallness of our virtues, should excite our faith when we are about to kneel in the tribunal of Penance or approach the Holy Table. It is true that the weak in faith are unable to draw near to the Sacraments with those precious lights which illumine souls of higher virtue ; but they can and they must concentrate their attention upon the mystery which is about to operate

within them. They can and they must bring into play all the light that they possess, and call to mind, according to the degree of faith to which they have attained, all the motives which would lead them to perform these holy actions worthily. Their vessel is small, but at any rate they can fill it to the brim. Their window is narrow, but at least let them open it to its full extent, so that the light and warmth of the Divine Sun may find its way in. All too often the shutters of the soul are fast closed and the rays of grace can scarcely find a passage. And the more enlightened Christians should also make an effort after recollection, abstracting themselves from inferior preoccupations, from profane thoughts, in order to unite themselves closely to God in gratitude and trust and love. God does not exact such perfect sentiments from the child who comes to Confession as from the pious and fully instructed adult, the religious who comes to unite himself with the Divine Bridegroom, or the priest who offers the Adorable Sacrifice. The insect pausing to drink at the river neither needs nor is able to absorb such deep draughts as would be required in order to slake the thirst of the parched stag. But all must prepare themselves according to their capacity, and then each one will receive grace in proportion to his necessities : *In mensuram uniuscujusque membri* (According to the operation in the measure of every part—Eph. iv. 16).

157. To enkindle our faith, to set before our eyes all the greatness of the act which we are preparing to perform, is our first duty when we are about to receive a Sacrament, but we must also excite within our hearts sentiments of gratitude to God, who opens the treasures of grace to us with such liberality ; to Jesus, who by such hard travail, such fearful sufferings, has merited this grace for us. We should not make it a great offence in young children if they were to take their places at the family board without always thinking how they owe this particular repast to their father's toil and their mother's care. To remember this fact sometimes is a duty, but their parents would not ask

it of them at every meal, nor would their food afford them greater nourishment in proportion to their gratitude. But our spiritual sustenance derives all its advantage from the interior dispositions with which it is received, the greatest profit being the reward of the most grateful souls. And to gratitude should be joined confidence, the desire to receive abundantly those graces of which faith shows us the value, and hope to enrich our souls and make them more pleasing and more dear to God. And then love comes into action—love, which is of all dispositions the most efficacious for obtaining the full effects of the Sacrament and causing it to produce its greatest fruits. This love must exist in the heart, but it must also prove its existence by works. The more the Christian who approaches the Sacraments forces himself to make his conduct accord with his sentiments, and the greater the generosity and courage that he displays in self-sacrifice, the more powerful will be the Divine operation in his soul, and the greater the growth of his love. And thus, by a wonderful reciprocal action, love makes the reception of the Sacraments ever more fruitful, while the most abundant fruit of the Sacrament is the increase of love.

CHAPTER XX

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

Lavamini, mundi estote . . . ; si fuerint peccata vestra ut coccinum, quasi nix dealbabuntur (Wash yourselves, be clean . . . ; if your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow).—Isa. i. 16, 18.

§ 1. *Shame, the Consequence of Sin.*

158. Man, before the Fall, could contemplate himself with pleasure, not in order to delight in his perfections, as being his own—for he knew too well that in himself he was nothing—but to admire God's gifts, and thereby to awaken feelings of gratitude in his heart. And the saintly soul regards itself with these same feelings of humility and gratitude. It cannot sufficiently admire God's mercy and goodness in thus taking pleasure in embellishing and enriching so wretched a creature, one that has offended Him and thus rendered itself all unworthy of the Divine blessings. The very elect know no other sentiments than these ; they cannot contemplate themselves without offering up their homage to the infinite love of God.

After our first parents' sin, a sensation which they had not yet experienced, and which was neither happiness nor gratitude, awoke in their souls. It was sorrowful ; it overpowered them ; in it they already found a punishment for their sin. And this new experience was shame. Their descendants also experience this result of Adam's and of Eve's sin when they imitate their wrong-doing, but the confusion may be either profitable or harmful. To the feeling of shame which, after the commission of a fault, arises spontaneously in the sinner's heart, a sentiment of

humility may be added. He will then find peace in repentance, for humility abases us, but it does not wound ; the humble man gladly recognizes the justice of the humiliations which he has suffered ; he loves to do homage to the truth. But if the shame does not engender humility, it produces a quite contrary effect. The sinner in his confusion sees no attractions in the truth : it wounds him ; he would fly from it, hiding his vileness even from God's eyes, from his own and those of his brethren. Humility breeds simplicity, trust, and peace ; shame, when the guilty person yields to it, gives birth to false excuses, lies, anxiety, and distress of mind. In order to avoid these painful emotions, the sinner, unable to deny his fault, forces himself to forget it. He tries to stifle all recollection of it, and does serious harm to his soul by the dissipation which estranges him from God, making him neglect his duties and abandoning him as a ready prey to renewed attacks of temptation. And thus it is that sin engenders shame, and shame becomes the further cause of fresh sins.

159. But in the Sacrament of Penance, God has given us a remedy for all these evils. There pride is broken down and humility becomes an inevitable duty. Far from hiding our weaknesses, even from our own selves, we must search them out and acknowledge them in all sincerity ; instead of hardening ourselves against humiliation, instead of seeking how to palliate our faults with lying excuses, we must exhibit them honestly before the eyes of one of our fellowmen—a sinner like ourselves. God thus obliges us to triumph over the most deeply rooted of all the sentiments of the human heart ; and if we enter fully into His designs, if we receive this great Sacrament with perfect dispositions, it will bring forth marvellous fruits within our souls. *Qui se humiliat exaltabitur* (He that humbleth himself shall be exalted—St. Luke xiv. 11). Humiliations, practised heartily in the tribunal of Penance, will be recompensed a hundredfold by the glory that they will produce for all eternity. But those who have performed this duty of humility imperfectly

will, on the other hand, derive but little fruit from their confessions; the expiation for their self-love is still to be made. And this compulsory expiation which they must undergo will be far more painful than it would have been if voluntarily performed.

160. In our old penal code there used to be an ignominious penalty, which has now disappeared from our statute-books, certain culprits being punished by a public exposure. On market-days, when the square was crowded, the condemned persons were hoisted upon a platform called the pillory, their crime being placarded so that all who passed by might read it. The shame which they could not escape was supposed to act as a just chastisement to the culprit and a salutary lesson to the bystanders. When we think of the pains of the world to come, the tortures of Hell, the sufferings of Purgatory, we dwell chiefly on the pangs caused by the flames or the privation of the vision of God. But Divine justice punishes man through the faculty by which he has offended. He who has sinned by pride deserves to be punished by humiliation, and it seems probable, therefore, that those who have not made reparation here for their faults of vanity or pride will be overwhelmed with confusion hereafter. "Nothing is covered which shall not be revealed," Our Lord has said, "nor hid that shall not be known" (St. Matt. x. 26). May not this manifestation of conscience wear a punitory character even in Purgatory, and repair the sins of pride with which we have offended God? This will be the pillory of the proud, and those who refused to humble themselves as they deserved here will have to submit to terrible humiliations. All those faults, with their most secret details, their aggravating circumstances, the low motives which vitiated actions once applauded and praised by the world—all those thoughts which we conceal so carefully, and which would cover us with confusion if they were revealed in the light of day, God can make known. He can show the many graces which were offered to us, and all our abuse of them; the

good which the soul might have accomplished ; the degree of glory to which it was called. He may ordain that other souls, holier, or already purified in part, should become aware of the faults and imperfections which He is punishing, and that the Angels should add their reproaches to the sufferings of the guilty. And what excuses can these unhappy ones offer ?

§ 2. *Effects of the Sacrament of Penance.*

161. A good confession is a reparation for pride, that cause and groundwork of so many evils ; it is a remedy against the fatal consequences of our sins, envenomed as they are and made still more dangerous by self-love ; it is also a very efficacious means of purifying the soul from its stains.

" Sprinkle me with hyssop," says the Psalmist, " and I shall be cleansed ; wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow " (Ps. l. 8). Sins forgiven still leave some traces on the soul, for every stain does not disappear at the first act of repentance. Pardon is doubtless accorded when the sin is sincerely detested, but reparation must still be made ; and as long as the soul has not paid its debt to the Divine Justice it does not regain its immaculate beauty. Thus the souls in Purgatory have disowned all their sins—if not in this world, then in the next—as soon as the state of their consciences was revealed to them ; and God immediately pardoned all their faults. But meanwhile they still see themselves as all covered with stains, and they become pure only little by little, as their expiation becomes accomplished.

In the Sacrament of Penance it is the Blood of Jesus Christ which flows mysteriously over the guilty soul, causing a wonderful increase in the purifying virtue of contrition. If this virtue is imperfect, and consequently insufficient to obtain the pardon of any grave fault, the Sacrament supplies what is wanting. When repentance proceeds

from a real love, it suffices for pardon. If the soul is already in a state of grace, this act of perfect repentance increases its charity and lessens the debt of expiation; but when the power of the Sacrament is added to that of perfect contrition, sanctifying grace, and consequently habitual charity, are greatly augmented, and a far higher degree of purification will be attained in the soul. The eye of the infinitely holy God can then rest upon this purified soul with more complacency; and He who is wounded by the slightest stain, finding no further obstacle to His munificence, can bestow upon the soul His abundant graces.

§ 3. *The Proper Dispositions for the Sacrament of Penance.*

162. The effects of the Sacrament of Penance, as we have just explained, are very precious. They are produced (as we have said of all the Sacraments) in a measure that varies according to the dispositions of the recipients. With what dispositions do you, pious reader, approach this sacred tribunal? Is your faith ardent, your humility profound, your repentance intense? and what part does love take in your contrition?

163. The same spirit of faith which makes us see God in His works, which reveals Him in Nature, shows Him to us still more clearly in the person of the priest. In the priest God both reveals and hides Himself. He reveals Himself; for the authority with which the priest judges and absolves, that peace which steals into the soul when the words of pardon have been pronounced, clearly testify that we have here more than man. But He shows Himself only under a veil, leaving to the virtue of faith all its merit. The more lively this virtue, the more clearly do we discover God under the priestly veil. Christians whose faith is feeble and unillumined, who contemplate creation without thinking of the Creator, never dream of seeing God in the person of His minister. Instead of seeing in him God's representative, they occupy themselves with

the consideration of the priest's human qualities or defects. This is a stumbling-block for many souls, an obstacle which stands in the way of their finding God in Confession, of enjoying the abundance of His revelation and tasting that peace which comes from Him. If we abandon ourselves to the distress which the sight of certain of our faults causes us, we shall approach the Sacrament reluctantly. And how, then, shall we obtain its full fruits? If we come to seek human qualities, it is for the sake of natural consolations; and in proportion as we seek for merely human satisfactions we rob ourselves of those which are Divine. We often find motives of faith blending with others that are human; and then the results, if we can speak thus, are mixed. There are some supernatural effects, but these are not the most sensible. The penitent feels comforted and encouraged, because he has poured out his heart, has been upheld, gently received, approved. But if this courage is only momentary, if this strength which we think we have drawn is merely superficial and is not proof against the least difficulties, it is to be feared that the sentiments on which we were relying had neither faith for their foundation nor God for their Author.

Whoso seeks God finds God (*Quærite et invenietis*, St. Matt. vii. 7). Let us seek only God; let us go and lay bare before Him all our defects, all our cowardly acts; above all, let us have the intention of making reparation to Him for the many sins which have been an outrage to His goodness, purifying our souls and making them more worthy of the Divine regard. Thus will more faith and more love be found in our hearts, and our confessions will be of greater utility to us than in the past.

164. And love will make our every action more profitable. It is not by the sadness caused by our faults that we must judge the fruits of the Sacrament, but rather by the love which to a greater or less degree contributes to this sorrow. Are there not some souls that approach the holy tribunal

with a feeling of deep sadness, and are more afflicted at the sight of their own miseries than because they have displeased God? These obtain less grace than those who are calmer, but whose love is stronger and more pure.

Love should be found in the germ even in the case of those whose contrition is imperfect and who renounce sin mainly because of the fear of chastisement. If the thought of God is not sufficient for their conversion, they must at least have an esteem for a God so good and so worthy of love, and must have some wish not to offend Him. If they did not possess these beginnings of love, if their resolutions were merely inspired by egotism, how could they obtain pardon?

But a true Christian does not content himself with these rudiments of love; he desires to excite in his heart a perfect contrition. We ought to detest sin and sincerely desire to renounce it, solely because it is an offence against God; and this motive, without destroying the motive of spiritual advantage which it includes, should be the dominant spring of our contrition. It would always be thus, and abundant would be the fruits of the Sacrament of Penance if, in approaching the holy tribunal, we thought more of God and less of ourselves, if we brought with us more perfect dispositions of detachment and Divine love.

165. Self-love, which spoils so many good works, so many pious actions, often follows us, even to that place of humility and repentance—the confessional. We go there to cleanse our souls from the soil of sin, and we should neither deceive ourselves nor fear to expose those stains by which we are defiled. But we must not concentrate all our attention upon this miserable sight, letting ourselves be absorbed in the spectacle of our wretchedness and neglecting to lift up our eyes to God. We should never so much as touch this foulness of sin, except to cast it from us. Let us, therefore, avoid disturbing it perpetu-

ally, for the nauseating odours which will arise are enough to suffocate us and cause us to lose strength and courage. Let us rather turn ourselves, turning this pestilential mass also, toward the Divine Sun ; let us expose it to His burning rays, that they may purify its vileness and restore it to health once more.

Introspection is a duty which exposes us to certain dangers ; the gaze which we focus upon our own souls must be controlled and enlightened by God. IT MUST ALWAYS BE PRECEDED AND FOLLOWED BY A GLANCE OF ADMIRATION AND LOVE DIRECTED TOWARDS GOD HIMSELF. Lucifer regarded himself, but his gaze was not ordered by God. He contemplated himself and lost sight of the Almighty, and his proud self-satisfaction proved fatal to him. Judas also regarded himself with a scrutiny which God did not control ; he saw himself without at the same time considering God's merciful goodness, and so he perished in his despair.

166. Our sins will seem no less odious and detestable if we examine them as in God's holy presence ; rather, we shall understand far better all the evils which they cause us, all the chastisements which they have deserved, and, more particularly, all the ingratitude and insolence that inspired them. Grave sin separates us from God ; it ranks us amongst His enemies ; it makes us worthy of the companionship of the devils ; it deprives us of the Divine illuminations, and plunges our souls into darkness. And it produces these sad effects because it attacks the infinite attributes of the Most High ; it upsets the Divine plans by the violation of His holy laws ; it tends to the negation and destruction of the justice, the holiness, the goodness of God. Venial faults do not separate us from God ; they do not erect a solid barrier between God and the soul ; but they produce a more or less thick mist, which, without hiding God entirely, is an obstacle to His action ; for if venial sins do not tend to destroy His schemes, to overthrow His justice and His wisdom, they injure them nevertheless, and

in part hinder these Divine attributes from producing their beneficial effects.

The soul which is on fire with love, considering what sin is with regard to God, understands all this ; the more ardent the love, the more it perceives the absolute opposition existing between God and sin ; the more it understands how gross is the offence, how grave the outrage, how insane and detestable the revolt of the sinner. The greater a son's love for his father and mother, the more alive is he to anything that offends them ; and if it is he himself who in a misguided moment has shown them a want of respect, his repentance is the more bitter in proportion to the depth of his affection.

167. The loving and enlightened soul sees how God is wounded by sin, even more clearly than it perceives its own wounds. God cannot tolerate sin. Jesus was the dearly beloved Son of the Father. In Him the Almighty was well pleased. No human words are capable of giving an idea of the Father's love for His only-begotten Son. In the hour of His agony Jesus willed to present Himself to His Father, bearing all our iniquities, so that the thunderbolts of the Divine Justice might be concentrated upon Himself. God's love for His Son seemed, as it were, suspended, and Jesus bore the entire weight of the Divine vengeance in His all-holy soul. So terrible was His anguish that He would have died at Gethsemani but for a miracle. "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me ?" So He cried on Calvary. Having "laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. liii. 6), the Lord owed it to His justice to rain down all His chastisement upon the Holy Victim : *Propter scelus populi mei percussi eum* (For the wickedness of My people have I struck Him—Isa. liii. 8).

The soul of Jesus was sorrowful even unto death, not merely on account of the tortures which were awaiting Him, or the spectacle of the ingratitude of those whom He was desirous of saving, but also, and especially, because of the insults offered by sin to the majesty and

goodness of God. His gaze, more powerful than that of all Angels and men combined, contemplated as none other could ever do all that there is in God's unfathomable perfections which merits respect, adoration, and love, and all that there is of odious and horrible in the creature's revolt against Him. Our dear Redeemer understood what punishment was due to such disorders, and what, therefore, would be the torments of Hell for so many souls whom He loved and whom He would have desired to save. But He does not remain bowed down under the weight of the Divine justice. *Surgite, eamus* (Arise, let us go), He said to His disciples; "behold, he is at hand that will betray Me" (St. Matt. xxvi. 46).

He yearns to be baptized with the baptism of blood (*baptismo habeo baptizari*), it is a longing which He cannot contain, a desire the postponement of which has already caused Him real anguish: *Quomodo coarctor usquedum perficiatur* (I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished?—St. Luke xii. 50)—the desire to expiate and repair the offences committed against His Father.

168. This is our model. If we desire that our confessions should be pleasing to God, and that they should purify our souls fully, we must imitate Our Blessed Lord's dispositions. We must arouse deep feelings of reverence and love for God in our hearts, detesting our faults, because they offend His infinite goodness; and, instead of remaining crushed under the weight of our sins, we must do our utmost to make expiation and reparation for them.

169. And so contrition becomes a mingling of bitterness and of sweetness, of pain and of peace; it even admits of a quiet feeling of joy. Magdalen weeps at the feet of Jesus. Is she thinking only of herself and of her sinfulness? Are her tears merely tears of shame and abasement? No! She weeps from repentance and joy—repentance because she has offended her God; joy because she is clinging to her dear Lord's feet. She understands

that this contact with the Flesh of the Sacred Humanity purifies the stains of her sinful flesh. Magdalen is no longer occupied with her beauty; she is not thinking how to enhance her charms by vain ornaments; she is not afraid of soiling her luxuriant hair by wiping away the dust from her Saviour's feet. Those round about her stare and are astonished; they begin to murmur at her, but she gives them no heed; enraptured by the Master's goodness and holiness, by the sweetness and power of His Divine presence, *her thoughts are with Him, and not with herself.* If she looks towards her own sinfulness, it is in order to regret that her faults should wound those pure eyes; but does she not at the same time rejoice in the reflection that Jesus will communicate to her something of His grace and of His virtue, that He will cover her with His merits and adorn her with His love?

170. When love is thus the dominant feature in contrition, the resolve to change the whole way of life becomes more generous, the conversion more complete. Zacheus desired to behold Jesus; the Saviour, who reads all hearts, saw his good dispositions, and made affectionate advances to him. He asked his hospitality, giving him the preference over many others who considered themselves more worthy of this honour and murmured. Zacheus was overjoyed—*excepit illum gaudens* (St. Luke xix. 6)—and the emotion which swelled his heart was the joy of love. But he soon gave a more striking proof of this love, which increased in response to Our Lord's action and enkindled his whole soul. On the morrow, as Jesus was leaving him and resuming His journey to Jerusalem, "Behold, Lord," said Zacheus, "the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have wronged any man of anything I restore him fourfold." There were many others who had received Jesus under their roofs, but they had not, like Zacheus, profited by His visit. Zacheus, the chief of the publicans—Zacheus the sinner, who had enriched himself in a calling which was justly looked down upon—

gives himself entirely to Jesus; in a few hours he had learnt to know and love the Divine Master; his love was pure and disinterested; there was no return to self, and hence this heroic act of self-spoliation which made reparation for all the past.

§ 4. *The Remote Preparation: Purity of Soul.*

171. Magdalen's conversion was swift, as was also that of Zacheus. In one instant God is able to change the sinner's dispositions; but these examples do not authorize us to count upon this sudden action of grace. On the contrary, if we wish to derive much profit from our confessions, we should not put off our preparation to the last minute. We may, of course, confine ourselves to the proximate preparation, but if we join to this the remote preparation, the habitual disposition, the effect will be more complete and more surely attained.

For how long a time, alas! do we remain free from sin! Where is the day that we have not something to reproach ourselves with? Life's paths are miry and foul; we hardly go a step without contracting new stains; and shall we continue thus defiled in the eyes of the all-pure, all-holy God, who cannot endure the slightest blemish upon His children's souls? Oh, if we but knew how SIN, UNREPAIRED, IMPEDES THE EFFUSIONS, OR, AT LEAST, HINDERS THE OPERATION OF DIVINE GRACE! This is the explanation of the small progress made by so many pious persons; they do not make sufficient reparation for their faults; they do not keep their souls sufficiently pure.

172. The grace which God pours into the just soul is pure and holy and marvellously powerful. Issuing from the Heart of Jesus, bought by Him at the price of awful sufferings, produced by the action of the Holy Spirit, it possesses virtue which is capable of giving birth to wholly supernatural works. And what marvels does it not accomplish in the absolutely pure heart—what prodigies, for instance, in angelic spirits, in the souls of the Saints, and more particularly, again, in the immaculate heart of Mary!

This is because in pure hearts it is poured out in its full abundance; there is nothing which repels or changes it, nothing which diminishes its splendour or its strength, which hinders it from penetrating into every corner of the soul. It flows, therefore, uninterruptedly from the Heart of God and distributes itself throughout all the faculties: the memory, which it fills with holy recollections; the mind, which it inundates with holy illuminations; the heart, which it inflames with love. But in a soul wherein the remains of sin still continue, those faults for which satisfaction has not been made to God, and which, although pardoned, leave their fatal traces, grace can be outpoured but sparingly.

173. And not only does the unpurified soul receive Divine grace with less abundance, but a barrier is opposed even to that which is communicated to it, and it only partially accepts the salutary impressions. The operation of grace is delicate. God's voice makes itself heard in a striking manner only when some grave sin is to be renounced or hindered. But when it is a question of a warning against some light fault, obtaining the performance of a more perfect work, supplying light for the guidance of others, or for the government of our neighbour, the inspiration is more guarded, and is but a sweet invitation. If grace is repulsed, it may sometimes repeat the call, but it will soon be silent. How many souls are there who cordially accept the inspirations which lead them to a certain virtue!—obedience, for instance, strictness of life, chastity or vocal prayer—while rejecting those which demand greater abnegation, such as acts of poverty, humility, or recollection. Or they accept certain sacrifices, whilst always refusing others. They are willing to be devout, but they will not mortify themselves. They are ready to serve God, but not to watch over their speech or to be charitable in their judgments. Eventually they receive also the graces of obedience and prayer; but still they do not think of performing those acts of renunciation, of poverty, of mortification, or of kindness, which they

have already refused. Formerly it cost them something to refuse certain sacrifices ; now they do not trouble about them any more ; they suffer from a partial blindness. Why should God send them inspirations which they are determined to reject ? Grace no longer operates with all its strength and fulness within their hearts. Where the avenues are open, grace enters in, but it is arrested before certain barriers which the soul has not taken the trouble to remove. This state of things often continues during an entire lifetime. How many souls will never see themselves clearly until the Day of Judgment !

And to what lengths do not their illusions go at times ! There are some people who remain in complete ignorance as to their own faults ; dissatisfied with their neighbours and complaining of them readily, they are perfectly contented with themselves ; they contemplate their own little good qualities, and are constantly talking of their sufferings, their resignation, their devotion. They will sometimes accuse themselves in the tribunal of penance of none but the most insignificant faults. They do not say, because they do not perceive it, how they have a bad disposition, how they are constantly complaining, how prone they are to criticize and condemn others, how they cannot bear to be contradicted. This is delusion carried to its full limits—a deplorable state of blindness.

If every voluntary imperfection, all resistance to grace, and, still more, all deliberate sin, obscures the intelligence and leads to partial blindness, these same causes will produce no less fatal effects in the will.

The Christian soul that has not practised the act of virtue to which it was impelled, feels a diminution in its attraction for that virtue, and an increase in the opposite inclination. Until fresh victories have repaired its cowardice and restored to the will its former good dispositions, a greater effort will be required for the achievement of the holy acts which it has declined to perform.

174. Pious souls who read these lines ! there are doubt-

less existing in you some obstacles to grace—obstacles proceeding from faults which you have committed and for which you have not made reparation. Pray earnestly that God will make these known to you ; and, the more certainly to rid yourselves of them, do penance generously for such faults as you are aware of and also those of which you may still be ignorant. At this price only will you recover the light which was offered to you and which you did not know how to receive ; above all, you will break that will which, having refused to bend under the action of grace, has lost its pliancy, and is no longer as docile as it once was to the Holy Spirit of God.

When trials overtake you, receive them as well-merited chastisements : " O God, I thank Thee for this opportunity of expiating my past faults. I am only too justly punished for all my offences against Thee. I thank Thee for thus aiding me to repair my ingratitude towards Thee and to purify my soul from its innumerable stains." And do not rest satisfied with the troubles which Providence permits for your good. Have courage to treat yourself as you deserve ; let your modesty make expiation for all the idle glances of your eyes, the silence of your tongue for all its guilty words, your bodily austerities for all your softness and sensuality ; and, above all, let the sacrifice of your tastes, the repression of your desires, atone for your many reprehensible actions. Each evening, after asking pardon for the sins of the past day, take some means to expiate them. If your love is deep and sincere, penance will not be unwelcome ; it will be the desire of your heart to make reparation to God and to punish yourself for your faults. Then your soul, which otherwise would become more soiled from day to day, will acquire a greater purity. Then, when you go to ask pardon of God's minister, you will not find it difficult to excite in your soul sentiments of a perfect contrition and to draw from the Sacrament of Penance those most precious graces of purification, of conversion, and of love.

CHAPTER XXI

THE HOLY EUCHARIST

Desiderio, desideravi hoc Pascha manducare vobiscum (With desire have I desired to eat this Pasch with you).—St. Luke xxii. 15.

§ 1. *The Eucharist, the Memorial of Jesus Christ.*

175. It would be folly to wish to fathom the mystery of the Incarnation, to think of understanding all the charity of the Word-made-Flesh. At the sight of such greatness and such abasement the Heavens stand amazed and the spirits of the Blessed silently adore; for the brilliant illuminations of the light of glory reveal to them in this mystery marvels of which we do not even dream. But at the same time they perceive that it is an abyss of love which none but God can sound to its depths. God alone was able to conceive, as He alone could perform, such a prodigy. And this mighty God, He for whom that which seems impossible to us is but child's play, has been able to realize and to conceive that other prodigy also, which is, as it were, the consequence of the Incarnation and the cause of the same astonishment, the same admiration to the elect—the Holy Eucharist. A God taking human form! O immeasurable mystery of love! A God taking the appearance of bread and wine! O mystery no less incomprehensible—a mystery also of love!

176. The Eucharist has been truly called the Sacrament of Love. It is the fruit and also the memorial of Divine love. When two friends separate they like to give each other some remembrance; each fears lest distance should

lessen his friend's affection. "Out of sight, out of mind," says the proverb. The one who is the most deeply attached wonders whether his devotion will not be in part forgotten. Will my friend's new preoccupations, new relations, permit him to think as frequently of me when he no longer sees my face and hears my voice? Will he recollect all that I have been to him, all that I have done for him? Let me give him some object which, being always before his eyes, will speak to him of me!

Such must have been our sweet Saviour's thought when He was on the point of quitting His children on earth, and He must have dreaded seeing Himself forgotten all the more because it is only through reigning in our hearts and penetrating us with His example that He can do us good. His life—a life all love—His life of detachment, poverty, zeal, sweetness, and goodness, His pregnant words, His heavenly teachings, His sorrows, His Passion, and His death, His Resurrection and His triumph, His glory and His power, supply us with the most salutary lessons, with the most powerful encouragements and the most holy and loving ardour. Woe to those who lose sight of the benefits and sublime virtues of their Lord; of what help do they not deprive themselves, what strength do they not lose, and into what an extreme weakness do they not fall!

No! Jesus will not be forgotten. He will not forfeit the fruits of His sacrifice. The Evangelists have preserved the history of His life, but this is not sufficient. The Gospel is for all, and we are less touched by common than by special benefits. Jesus, therefore, desires to leave a memorial to each one of His children, and He institutes the Eucharist. There He will be for all, but also for each; there, great and small, the healthy and the sick, the strong and the weak, can find Him, and each one receives Him entire. "Do this in remembrance of Me." When Jesus commanded His Apostles to baptize and to remit sins, He created a means of salvation which would doubtless recall

His sojourn here below to the generations to come. But He did not say of these Sacraments, as He said of the Holy Eucharist, " Do this in remembrance of Me," because the other Sacraments recall a part of Jesus only, and not His whole life. The Eucharist is Jesus Himself—Jesus who was born at Bethlehem ; who fled into Egypt ; who at Nazareth made acquaintance with the hard toils and the life of a workman ; who travelled here and there announcing the most exalted truths, healing the sick, scattering His benefits broadcast. It is the Jesus who was betrayed, mocked, scourged, crowned with thorns, crucified for us ; who, having now risen and ascended into Heaven, shares His Father's supreme powers and rains down His graces upon us. If the Paschal Lamb of the Old Law reminded the Jews of the blessing of their deliverance from Egypt, the Paschal Lamb of the New Dispensation recalls still greater benefits and in a still more striking manner. In the Holy Eucharist the Son of God is, as in the crib, yea, more than in the crib, unknown, abased. He is immolated, even as on Calvary ; but He is still glorious, powerful, blessing us, as in His Ascension.

This is what Jesus, in the institution of the Eucharist, has wished to fix in our memories ; and this is what we should think of when we approach the altar, when we assist at the Holy Sacrifice, when we go to Communion. Let us remember the humble Son of Mary—Jesus, the Model of all virtue ; Jesus, who by His example preaches to us humility, gentleness, devotion, zeal, and Divine love. The simple remembrance of His acts, the picture of His life, will profit us more than the best reasoned considerations upon the advantages of virtue ; it will awaken in our souls sentiments of esteem, admiration, and love for Him and a desire to imitate His example ; and this will be an excellent preparation to receive Him aright.

§ 2. *The Son of God's Designs in the Incarnation, and the Institution of the Holy Eucharist.*

177. Everything which helps us to understand Our Lord better, disposes us to receive Him with greater profit. *Medius vestrum stetit quem vos nescitis* (There hath stood One in the midst of you whom you know not—St. John i. 26), said St. John the Baptist, speaking to the Jews. Alas! many Christians are acquainted with the truth that God deigned to become man and to dwell among them, but they do not themselves appear to know Him, or, if at all, but imperfectly. And just because they know Him so ill, because they are ignorant of His perfections, His power, the admirable dispositions of the Heart of Jesus, they derive but little fruit from His abiding presence in their churches, and even from His visits to their own hearts.

178. Great is the Word of God, Splendour of the glory, perfect Image of the substance of the Father. He is eternal, He is vast, He is infinite. This great universe, the immensity of which fills us with awe, is less than a grain of dust in His sight. He sustains all things by the virtue of His word; and even as the Father is, so is the Son, all-powerful. He is boundless Wisdom, Love illimitable. Ah! who shall tell, who shall understand, the love of the Eternal Word for His Father? Who shall express, who shall comprehend the zeal for the Father's glory with which He has been consumed from all eternity? He rejoices because He can render to Him in the bosom of the Eternal Trinity an infinite glory; but He also desires that outwardly, in that world of creatures who owe everything to their Creator, His Father should receive a glory worthy of Himself. And God, the infinitely good, the infinitely great, merits this glory, both because of His majesty and His innumerable benefits. He pours forth upon us an inexhaustible wealth of gifts; He enriches His creatures with the most precious blessings. To Him, therefore, are praise, blessing, adoration, glory, and thanks justly

to be given. Yes, this should be ; but, alas ! it is not so. What a scanty harvest of glory, what a small measure of gratitude, does God receive from His creatures ! He gives with a boundless liberality, and His creatures yield Him but an imperfect homage ; they bring forth none but feeble, maimed, and polluted works ; or, worse still, they respond to His love with rebellion and sin.

This sad spectacle of human ingratitude has been before the eyes of the Eternal Word from all eternity ; and He desired, therefore, to avenge His Father's honour and to make reparation for His creatures' sins, choosing to undertake this work of reparation in His own Person ; and so He became Flesh and dwelt among us.

And in this Incarnation the Divine honour will be avenged, and God, for the first time, will receive a homage worthy of Himself. It is true that He has already found in the angelic hosts a multitude of faithful servants who have submitted themselves loyally to His will, and have loved Him with all the power of love of which they were capable. This is some compensation for the sins of mankind, but it does not suffice for God's glory. The Eternal Word can accomplish far more than this. The homage that He is about to render to His Father in His Incarnation will be a human homage, since it will be accomplished in a human nature ; but it will be a homage of infinite worth, because it is rendered by a Divine Person, and has a share in the infinite dignity of the Son of God. And thus will the Divine Word attain His end.

179. But this does not satisfy His love. He desires to associate these human creatures with the homage that He renders to His Father. He wills that men should glorify God, even as do their elder brothers, the Angels. He even willed that the most excellent homage which God had ever received should arise from this terrestrial globe ; and so He made choice of a creature upon whom He conferred a dignity surpassing all others—the dignity of the Mother of God. He dowered her with a power of glorifying

God surpassing the combined powers of all other creatures. He united Himself closely to her, giving her a share in His great work; and then from this inferior world there rose up to God a homage which glorified Him indeed; and God was able to contemplate with satisfaction the creatures of His hand. Never before had creation appeared so beautiful and so worthy of the Creator.

180. And with Mary, the Word also desired to associate other human creatures in His work of glorification. Yes, He wills through us to glorify His Father. If He vouchsafes us so many means of salvation, if He has founded His Church, if He has instituted His Sacraments, and particularly the Holy Eucharist; if He has concealed Himself under the veil of the Sacramental Species; if He gives Himself to us in Holy Communion, it is before all to procure for His Father a more worthy homage by our means.

The chief homage that He desires to procure for Him is the love of His creatures. For nothing can so please, nothing can so glorify God as love. To love is the great commandment which He lays upon us—the first, and the one in which all the others are comprised. He has a longing which we cannot even conceive, a burning thirst to possess our love; and in our works, the love which inspires them is what He chiefly esteems. It is by the Holy Eucharist, particularly, that Jesus wins our hearts; it is there that He shows Himself truly as the God of Love, and thence He excites our love and causes it to increase.

181. He also facilitates the exercise of love. Love craves to give. He who loves offers gifts, and the more valuable they are the greater his satisfaction. When we go to Communion we give ourselves to Jesus; for we hear His gentle voice speaking to us in our soul's most secret sanctuary: *Præbe, fili, cor tuum mihi* (My child, give Me thy heart). But we can do even more than this: we can offer Jesus to His Father. Jesus is our very own. Jesus has made Himself our possession; we can, then, offer a God

to a God. This, in fact, is what the Blessed Virgin did when she offered her Divine Son to the Father, not merely on the day of her Purification, not only upon Calvary, but on how many other occasions! This was what Jesus did when He offered Himself as a Victim to His Eternal Father. *To offer God to God!* Supreme homage, which surpasses all other gifts, all protestations of love, all marks of respect and adoration—a homage truly pleasing to God, a homage truly worthy of Him. It is true that the communicant makes this sublime offering in an imperfect manner; but none the less his offering is made in union with Mary's perfect offering; it is associated with the oblation that Jesus made of His own self, and that He still makes in the Holy Eucharist; it is, as it were, the continuation of His sacrifice, and in this lies its value.

182. The Son of God desired to glorify the Father by His Incarnation, and He also desired to offer to His Father a means of satisfying His love and His need of giving. As we have already said, all that is good tends to distribute itself, and the infinitely good Being takes delight in the communication of His gifts. God the Father gives His whole self to the Son; the Father and the Son give themselves wholly to the Holy Spirit—an eternal donation, infinite, incommunicable to all that is not God. But if God cannot give Himself entirely, outside Himself, He is pleased, nevertheless, to give, in a finite but superabundant manner, a participation in His riches and His happiness. But human creatures, unfortunately, lend themselves but ill to the designs of the infinite goodness. They offer such narrow vessels to the bounteous hands of God that He is constrained to withhold His gifts. When the Divine Word became Incarnate, Our Lord's Sacred Humanity offered itself to the Father as a vessel eminently capable of receiving His gifts,[1] and into it the Father was able to pour His

[1] The grace which Our Saviour received was, according to the theologians, an unsurpassable grace. *Probabile est dicere, secundum Magistrum* (P. Lombard) *quod Deus tantam gratiam ei contulerit*

limitless bounties. And at the same time He offered His holy Mother, into whom the full tide of God's grace could pour without overflowing—a vessel of a capacity superior to that of all others combined. Even as the rivers pour themselves into the sea without ever causing it to transgress its boundaries, so all graces entered into Mary's soul, and she was able to contain them. She had already received more than all the Angels and Saints together when the Word, on the day of the Annunciation, yet further augmented her treasures and most marvellously increased the measure of her sanctity, entering into her bosom to dwell there.

And that which He has begun in His Blessed Mother the Saviour continues to perform in us by Holy Communion. Uniting Himself with our souls, He makes them more fit to receive the Divine gifts; He enhances our dignity by His presence, our capacity by making us more loving. By our Communions we become more like unto Him, purer, holier, and more capable, therefore, of being deified by grace; and God the Father can then satisfy His love more completely by inundating us with His blessings.

§ 3. *God's Abasement in the Holy Eucharist.*

183. Such, then, are the designs of the Eternal Word. Such were they when He made Himself the God-Man; such they continue to be when He makes Himself the God-Host; designs of pure love, for it was His burning love for His Heavenly Father that inspired them. And we shall admire these designs of love still more if we consider how, for their realization, He has invented the most stupendous humiliation, He has abased Himself even unto annihilation, *exinanivit semetipsum*. He, the equal of His

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quantum potuit; potuit autem conferre summam gratiam creabilem (Ven. Scot, 3 d. 13, q. 4, No. 9; *cf.* S. Th., 3 q., 7, a. 12; Suarez, *De incarn.*, Disp. 22, Sect. 2). At any rate, it is certain that St. John speaks of it as the fulness of grace (St. John i. 14, 16).

Father as God, has made Himself, in becoming man, His servant ; *formam servi accipiens* (Phil. ii. 6, 7). He chose to become a true servant, having no other will than that of His Lord. "Wherefore, when He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldst not, but a body Thou hast fitted to Me. Then said I, Behold I come to do Thy will, O God" (Heb. x. 5, 9). The Word become a servant ! What a prodigy ! what a mystery of abasement !

We have seen this will of the Heavenly Father that the Word came to accomplish—reparation for sin and the salvation of the human race. God so loved His creatures ; and the Heart of Jesus partakes of this love. Dear to God above all His works are the souls of men. Made in His image, they reproduce some of the traits of His Divine beauty ; and we cannot therefore love God without loving those souls that are so dear to Him. God so loved the world, said Our Divine Lord to Nicodemus, as to give His only-begotten Son (St. John iii. 16). He delivered Him up for us all (Rom. viii. 32). This, then, was the mission upon which God sent His Son into the world, and which the Son, all on fire with this same love, accepted so gladly. And it was His love for His Father and His love for our souls which made Him thus joyfully embrace the humiliations of the Incarnation and the sufferings of the Redemption.

184. And He did not become the Servant of His Father only, but our Servant also. We should not dare to say it if He had not Himself declared it. *Non veni ministrari, sed ministrare* (The Son of Man is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister—St. Mark x. 45). Oh, how wonderful is the spectacle of our sweet Saviour thus making Himself the Servant of men—His brethren ; of men—His creatures ! Humbly He obeys them. During the thirty years of His hidden life He was obedient to Joseph and Mary ; during the whole of His ministry He was subject to all men, not belonging to Himself, labouring, toiling to seek and to save

the lost sheep of the House of Israel, not disdaining to solace the most miserable. He goes so far as to wash His disciples' feet for the sake of emphasizing the state of voluntary servitude to which He has reduced Himself. During the last days of His mortal life He carried His dependence to its lowest depths, submitting Himself even to His enemies. Does He not obey His executioners when they lead Him to torture, when they load Him with the cross, when they fasten Him to it? "Give me Thy feet!" And He offers them to be pierced. "Give me Thy hand!" And He yields it.

185. Thus was Jesus the Servant of His Father, the Servant of men, His brethren. The second state follows from the first, since it was for us—*propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem*—that His Father sent Him here below. But He fulfils this humble rôle with a dignity befitting God. He abases Himself, but His abasements are victories. He yields Himself, but in yielding He is a conqueror. And still combining these two extremes, uniting the irreconcilable, while continuing to be a King, He becomes also a Servant. Servant of all and Master of the world—such is Jesus.

By His humiliations, by His labours, by the shedding of His Blood, He has purchased the Church (Acts xx. 28). She is His; and He makes use of the empire which He has acquired over her to make her glorious, without spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish (Eph. v. 27). He makes Himself ours. He gave Himself and still gives Himself to us. And in doing this He vivifies and sanctifies His creatures. As the members derive strength, movement, and life from the head, so we receive from Jesus, whose mystical members we are, supernatural strength and the life of grace; as the branches receive from the vine the sap which causes them to fructify, so from Him we receive the mysterious sap by which we are sanctified and made Divine.

186. It is doubtless from God Himself and not from the

Sacred Humanity of Jesus that the stream of grace proceeds ; but by what right do we receive it ? who has made us capable of possessing it ? who has covered our unworthiness with His merits ? Is it not Jesus ? We are bought by Christ ; we are all His : *Dabo tibi gentes hæreditatem tuam* (I will give thee the Gentiles for thine inheritance). God the Father sees in us the continuation, as it were, of His Son ; He sees us as participating in the dignity of Him who is our Head, and capable, therefore, of the reception of Divine gifts. For the soul of Jesus was dowered without measure with these Divine gifts, and the grace which we receive is but the overflowing of this plenitude. *De plenitudine ejus nos omnes accepimus* (Of His fulness we all have received—St. John i. 16). And not only has Jesus merited grace for us, but He watches over us from Heaven. His Holy Soul knows all our needs ; His Heart, which loves us with a burning love, ardently desires our welfare. Ever living to make intercession for us (Heb. vii. 25), our Heavenly Advocate obtains for us by the prayers of His Sacred Humanity the gifts which, as God, He bestows upon us. He exhibits His most glorious wounds to the Father, and to His all-powerful intercession we owe all the blessings which are vouchsafed to us. Therefore is He truly our mediator (Heb. ix. 15) ; between God and us He is a Priest, truly and for ever—not that He renews the bloody sacrifice of Calvary, but that He continues to apply its fruits.

And is this all ? Is Jesus nothing but Our Redeemer and Our Advocate ? He who went about doing good here below—does He not continue His blessings from on high ? If our guardian Angels enlighten us, direct and protect us with such zeal, who shall tell the solicitude with which Our Lord watches over us ? Until the Great Day when all things shall be made plain unto us, we shall never know what we owe to Him—the holy impulses and inspirations, the dangers from which we have been protected, the favours which we have received ; and then our gratitude will rise up before Him for all eternity.

187. And such as He is in Heaven, such is He also upon the Altar. It is the same Jesus, glorious and humble, our King and our Servant, who gives Himself to us in the Holy Eucharist. He sitteth on the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. i. 3), and He places Himself at our disposal like the most docile servant. And while Jesus receives in Heaven the homage due to His dignity, while He never ceases to exercise His mission of Priest, of Mediator, He annihilates Himself in the Sacred Host; He obeys His creatures; He obeys His priests, who can handle Him at their will, deposit Him where they please, carry Him whither it may seem good to them, keeping Him a close Prisoner in the tabernacle, or exposing Him on a throne all set about with burning tapers; and in the Holy Mass, imposing upon Him the intentions for which He shall offer Himself to His Father. He puts Himself at the disposal of the faithful. Do they desire to enrich their souls by the reception of His Sacred Body? Jesus yields Himself to them; would they that His sacrifice should serve to their personal needs or for the relief of those for whom they weep? Jesus offers Himself for them. O ineffable mystery of abasement and love!

CHAPTER XXII

HOLY COMMUNION

Qui manducat meam carnem et bibit meum sanguinem, in me manet et ego in illo (He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me, and I in Him).—St. John vi. 57.

§ 1. *The Proper Dispositions for Holy Communion.*

188. We have just reminded you, Christian souls, whom it is that you receive when you communicate. Do you think of it? Do you sufficiently realize His greatness and goodness? Do you know what these words, *the Eternal Word*, represent in power, immensity, and all perfections? When you approach to receive Him, are you careful to set before your eyes His infinite majesty, His condescension, which is so touching, so encouraging, His love for His Heavenly Father and for us? He has said, "Do this in remembrance of Me"; and the more lively and faithful your remembrance of Jesus—the Eternal Son of God, the humble Son of Mary—the more ardent will become your sentiments of respect, faith, and love.

You will also thus purify your intention. Now the fruits which you derive from the Sacrament will in a large measure depend upon your intention in receiving it. What do you seek when you go to the Holy Table? Is it only the accomplishment of a duty? Your going proves your faith, your obedience, and the beginnings of love, and your sweet Saviour will perform His duty also; or, rather, He will fulfil His mission, and you will carry away some precious graces from His visit. Do you desire the consolations of piety, resignation in your trials, the lulling of

your passions, strength to combat them, or the reform of your character? Jesus possesses all these good things, and will communicate them to you abundantly. But if, all on fire with Divine love, enlightened by the higher illuminations of faith, you wish to nourish your soul with the Divinity; if you yearn with an ardent desire to be united to God, to be transformed into Him by the reception of a greater effusion of His light and His love; if you long by means of this transformation to produce acts which will glorify Him perfectly and be wholly pleasing to Him; if your desire is so strong that you are ready to sacrifice all those things to which Nature is inclined—ah! what a flood of grace will flow into your soul! For your desire corresponds to your Lord's desire—that glory of His Father which is dearer to Him than all else besides; and He will glorify Him by giving you the most precious gifts. How happy is He to find these same desires, that same zeal for the Divine glory, that same love in you! With what affection will He welcome you, and how happy will He be within your heart!

189. Yes, Christian souls, your sentiments rejoice your Saviour's Heart. He comes for the sake of doing you good, and He is so much the happier in proportion as He finds you well disposed; for He can then grant you still greater benefits. The Holy Eucharist is like a graft, and a graft cannot be made in dead wood, but only in a stem the living roots of which go down into the earth, upon a branch wherein the sap circulates. If the stock be weak and dying, the branch will languish and its fruits will be scanty and tasteless. Jesus, the Divine Gardener, comes to the soul which is already sanctified by grace, and grafts upon it yet another grace, which will produce fruits of virtue the more abundant and precious in proportion to the vigour of the first.

You have just been to Communion—that is to say, you have drawn near to God in order to become one with Him. If this intimate union is to be fully realized, should you

not begin by making yourself as like to Him as possible, reproducing His perfections in your own person? Two beings associate together the more easily as they resemble one another more; the less the likeness, the less perfect the union. What do they desire in binding themselves together? To join forces, to interchange knowledge, to afford each other a mutual succour. And this is not possible without a certain community of views, a similarity of tastes; otherwise the tie will be weak, and the association will produce no good result. If there is likeness and sympathy, the two partners exercise a happy influence upon each other; they come to share the same feelings, the same ideas, to form the same intentions, to have but one heart and one mind.

In the intimate union between God and your soul which takes place at the Holy Table, God, the changeless infinite Being, can receive nothing; He can only give. He comes, therefore, in order to communicate His light, to give you a share in His sentiments, to transform you into Himself. But His merciful designs will only be realized in the measure in which you lend yourself to them.

The Eucharist is a sustenance rather than a remedy. Food does not reduce fever or drive out humours; it maintains and improves the health. The remedy for our sins and defects is in the Sacrament of Penance, in acts of contrition and expiatory works. Quite other is the effect of the Eucharist: it nourishes, it sustains, it strengthens, it develops the good qualities which it encounters; it augments faith, hope, and love; the more strongly these virtues are implanted in the soul, the more growth and the more life will it derive from this Sacred Food.

190. How many obstacles to Our Lord's action in the Blessed Sacrament do many communicants oppose, by coming to Him full of sentiments quite unlike His own! Can fire consort with ice, calm with tempest, day with night?

Jesus is humility itself; this beautiful virtue of which

He has given and still gives us such a touching proof in the Holy Eucharist, He wishes to cultivate, and make it bear fruit in those whom He visits. But what does He often find? Sentiments of self-love which are not even disavowed! Listen to this person relating some trifling humiliation which he has suffered and which pride exaggerates. Does he desire to combat the assaults of self-love, and to derive strength from Jesus to help him to repress them? If this were so, the Communion would be indeed profitable. But no! "I refuse to permit anyone to treat me so. I will not tolerate this injustice silently; my equals have no consideration for me, my superiors no tenderness. But I will soon show them reason," etc. Or vanity is the master-motive; the one thought is for success, applause, human fame. And then this person goes to Communion? What can Jesus, the Meek and Humble of Heart, do in such a soul? Jesus, who sought not His own glory, who turned not away His face from the buffets and spittings of the executioners? Can He endow it with virtues which it does not even desire, and inspire it with Divine sentiments when it is filled with those which are purely human, not to say diabolic, and which it only wishes to retain?

Another is without any spirit of self-sacrifice; he has no idea of inconveniencing himself; he will not sacrifice his caprices in order to give pleasure or to do some irksome service. Or if at times he does a kind action, he takes out his payment in language which is a constant offence against charity. He judges harshly, disparages, criticizes, without any regard for his brother's reputation. Alas! how ill at ease would the all-loving Jesus be in this poor, loveless heart!

Then see this other soul, so wedded to its own will; everyone must yield to it, and even anticipate its wishes. Over-confident in its own judgment, it attempts to force its opinion upon all about it. When some contradiction or annoyance occurs, it becomes bitter and irritable; nothing

seems right except what it does itself. And as long as it has not striven to correct itself, has not tried to learn self-sacrifice, how can it hope to associate with Him who said: "I came down from Heaven, not to do My own will" (St. John vi. 38)?

Then, again, there is the Christian who prefers pleasure to duty; his one idea seems to be to spend his life agreeably. He searches for ways of making the time pass pleasantly; he devotes whole hours to games, weeks and months to journeys of mere pleasure. How can his company be congenial to Him of whom the Holy Spirit has said: *Christus non sibi placuit* (Christ did not please Himself—Rom. xv. 3)?

191. Defects which are neither recognized nor detested are like brazen walls, stemming the tides of grace. If there are many of these defects in a soul, Divine grace will be everywhere shut out, and Communions, no matter how numerous, will produce little fruit. Defects which are but half combated are like high and thick hedges through which the beneficent rays of grace can penetrate by some few interstices only. Every limitation in our gift of self to God; every attachment, consented to by the will or the judgment; each habitual defect; every feeling of bitterness towards a neighbour which is not repudiated, will, without entirely hindering the good effects of the Sacrament, be an obstacle to the abundant outpourings of grace.

Other communicants, without having any very notable defects, live in a state of spiritual dissipation, when their vocation, their position, their functions, would call for a really interior life; they are not recollected; their prayers are few and devoid of fervour; they let themselves be overrun by human cares, absorbed by material occupations. When Our dear Saviour comes to them with all the riches which He desires to give them, they pay Him but small attention; immersed in their ordinary pursuits, they ask little of Him, give Him but a poor proof of their love, accord Him grudgingly some few acts of thanksgiving.

They are, therefore, able to receive but comparatively insignificant gifts ; and Jesus, who came to them with full hands, must either carry almost all His treasures back again into His Heaven or offer them to other souls.

192. You Christians who come to Jesus, let not your conduct be like this. Make ready a place which shall be worthy of Him. Begin by putting away all such feelings as might be displeasing to Him, and practise those virtues which make the beauty of His Sacred Heart. This most important remote preparation facilitates the proximate preparation of recollection and prayer. Then, when you possess Him within you, adore your God, realize your own nothingness, unite your sentiments to His. His Father's glory is Our Saviour's first aim in thus visiting you ; His first thought is for Him ; from this new altar, which is your heart, He delights to offer His homage to God, and He invites you to unite your homage with His. May God's holy Name be glorified, His kingdom come, His will be done ! This is His first request, and this also should be your first prayer in union with Jesus. At that solemn moment, from the Heart of Jesus, beating within your breast, arise acts of love which glorify Him infinitely more than any which you have ever made or will make. God, from the sanctuary of your innermost being, is by a God adored, loved, blessed, and exalted. Oh, do not remain cold, indifferent to this sublime work ; rejoice, rather, and as far as possible take part in it. Those who refuse to fulfil the duty of Communion and of serving as the instrument or, more correctly, the altar of Jesus Christ, are certainly gravely culpable ; but they also are worthy of blame who, when they communicate, do not associate themselves with their Saviour's intentions.

193. Should we, then, forget our own needs and not take advantage of Our Lord's coming to show Him our necessities and to implore His graces ? Not so. Only this would not be the first thought of a soul on fire with love ; it would come to it soon, doubtless, for love makes it long

to be more pure, so that it may be more pleasing to God, holier to serve and love Him better ; but it will not think of itself in the same way as the imperfect soul. *This* is wholly engrossed with self, anxious to succeed in its undertakings, to avoid humiliating failures, to obtain all that gratifies its nature ; it takes advantage of Our Lord's coming to ask for everything that is personal ; or, if it is in any trouble, it abandons itself to its sadness. It is quite overcome, perhaps, by something that has wounded its self-love, or some opposition to its will ; or, again, it is full of anguish at the thought of some threatened ills. It sees nothing but its own troubles. Oh, how I suffer ! Oh, how unhappy I am ! This is its one cry. My God, spare me, comfort me ! It brings God down to self, instead of lifting itself up to Him. Ought we not to counsel such a one to think less of its own interests, more of God's glory and of what concerns Him ; to show a greater love to that God who visits it through love—that God who has not counted the cost of His sacrifices, nor spared His sufferings ?

§ 2. *The Effects of Communion.*

194. Oh, how happy are those souls who come to Jesus filled with a holy love ! In them is realized that saying which Our Saviour twice uttered : " For he that hath, to him shall be given " (St. Matt. xiii. 12 ; xxv. 28). The Eternal Father, beholding this wonderful abasement of the All that conceals itself in the nothing, of the Infinite Purity that condescends to enter into the sinful soul, and the efforts of this soul to correspond to so much love, is touched at the sight. With an infinite tenderness He contemplates His Son in His humiliation and the poor human creature which possesses Him and strives to unite itself with Him, to become like to Him — to give birth to the same sentiments, the same desires which it perceives in Him. The prayer of the Eternal Son of God and the prayer of the humble communicant are one ; their protestations of

love, their adoring homage, their gratitude, rise up together to the throne of God, and the all-powerful Father is vanquished. He cannot refuse that which is thus asked of Him.

195. And the Word of God, who, living amongst men, loaded them with benefits; He whose power and whose goodness were such that the sick were healed by a simple contact with His garments—what graces does He not bestow upon them whom He makes His Temple and His Sanctuary, and who oppose no obstacles to His beneficent action? Holy Communion is, upon earth, the term of Our Lord's desires, the end of His efforts, the last aim of all His labours. Here the work of His Incarnation is completed. The Flesh which He took in Mary's bosom unites itself to our flesh for our purification; His Soul unites itself to our souls for our sanctification; His Heart to our hearts, that His love may be poured out upon us; His Spirit unto our spirits in order that we may be illumined by His own light. How happy is He to bless those faithful Christians who, by their generous and persevering efforts, have succeeded in acquiring virtues and sentiments—weak, it is true, but still resembling His sentiments and His virtues! These are they whom Our Lord chooses for His friends. He finds a perfect accord between their tastes and His own; the same desires which animate His Heart—the desire for His Father's glory, for the salvation of souls—are also the sole aspirations of their faithful hearts. The pains that they feel at the sight of man's ingratitude towards God, and of the evils with which these sinners are threatened, were those that called forth the Saviour's tears. He finds in them the same indifference which He feels towards purely earthly joys, to this world's pleasures. Their hearts beat in unison with the Heart of Jesus. How great, then, is His delight in such friends as these! How close is their union with Him; how great the spiritual treasure that He pours into their souls!

196. The Holy Spirit enlightens and enkindles them.

The effect of His operations are analogous to those which He produces in the soul of the just after death. The soul, then, freed from all its errors, all the base conceptions which filled it in this world, lifted above the mists of this earthly life, receives vivid illuminations which enlighten it concerning God's greatness and holiness and its own wretchedness. The will, delivered from all natural desires, all imperfect attachments, has no other aspiration than that of seeing God reign within it and of destroying all remains of sin. This is the work of the Holy Spirit within it ; and as it gives itself up entirely to His action, the Divine operations bear magnificent fruits—not, however, immediately, but progressively. The soul's enlightenment, its burning love, become, so it seems to us, more complete as the work of purification advances. At least, there is no obstacle to the work of the Holy Spirit, and very marvellous is the soul's continual progress in light and in love. The forward movement only ceases when the fully purified soul can exercise its love without impediment, according to the degree of merit which it possessed at the moment of death.

It is true that the Holy Spirit acts in a different way in the soul of the communicant, for there He augments habitual grace ; but we see an analogy between His action here and on the soul in Purgatory. Every Communion, made with proper dispositions, wonderfully enlightens and sanctifies those souls that belong entirely to God. They learn there more and more both what God is and what they are—God's power and their own weakness, God's intentions with regard to them and their own evil inclinations. These are the abysses which we can sound unceasingly without ever fathoming their depth. And at the same time, and perhaps even more, the love of all that is good, all that is true and holy—the love of God especially, His essential goodness and holiness—may indefinitely increase. This is what the Holy Spirit achieves in the communicant's soul. He renders it more enlightened and more

loving, not by removing, one by one, the bands which fetter its faith and its love (as with the holy soul in Purgatory), but by the development of the faculty of faith and love within it.

197. What, then, must be the spiritual strength of the holy soul that communicates frequently? Other Christians may not suspect it; it may even be ignorant of it itself, for spiritual things constantly escape our human perceptions. A soul may possess supernatural virtues to an eminent degree, and in a continually increasing measure, without being aware of its own wonderful progress. Such a Christian, for instance—if we may reckon in figures those things which are immeasurable—such a Christian is a hundred, nay, a thousand times richer in faith, hope, love, humility, self-sacrifice, and chastity to-day than he was a year ago. These virtues, which were already developed in a marked degree, have not ceased to increase, and he has never suspected it. Being situated in the superior part of the soul, in the part of which WE ARE UNCONSCIOUS, he could not possibly gauge their depth and intensity. He will be much more aware of the contrary defects which are located in the inferior and sensible part, and which may create great disturbances even when they are repudiated by the will, which is firmly attached to the opposite virtues.

If, then, we have but a vague knowledge of the degree of virtue to which we have attained, still less can we reckon our accumulated merits, or see the increasing splendour of our souls. Here lie hid a whole world of marvels which our faith can only suspect; we shall know them only when the light of glory has illuminated our souls. We shall then see the fruits which Holy Communion has brought forth in pure souls; we shall perceive how each one of Our Divine Saviour's visits to His faithful friends has been to them a source of the most marvellously abundant grace.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE VIRTUES

Filioli, non diligamus verbo neque lingua, sed opere et veritate (My little children, let us not love in word, nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth).—1 St. John iii. 18.

198. By works God shows His love for us; by our works we must make proof of our love for Him, and so our love will become stronger and more vigorous. God, who wishes to lead us to perfect charity, impels us, therefore, towards the practice of virtue; for He desires by these means to impart an ever-growing strength to our souls, and to adorn them with a ravishing beauty.

Strength and beauty! Such is virtue. It causes the soul to increase in stature and loveliness, making it acceptable to men. For unless blinded by passion, they often give their affection, and always their esteem, to the virtuous soul. But how much dearer is it to the Heart of God! He perceives in it that *supernatural* strength which eludes our sight, but which gives it a vigour whereby all the assaults of the Devil, all the persecutions of men, all vicious inclinations, can be resisted—one whereby God can be glorified and the passions overcome. He sees virtue also as a magnificent adornment, and because each virtue has its special splendour, the soul that practises many virtues offers a marvellous spectacle to the Most High.

199. But the greatest source of satisfaction to the Heart of God is the fact that the soul adorned with supernatural virtues wears the likeness of His Divine Son. Jesus is the

model given to the world; the most heroic virtues of the Saints are but a reproduction of His, a feeble likeness, and falling far below the model, but still beautiful. Moreover, these supernatural virtues owe their very existence to the merits of the Incarnate Word. Therefore it is that our virtues appear to God as the sweet savour of His Son.

200. The supernatural *is a participation in the Divine Nature.* The beauty which supernatural virtue gives to our souls is a celestial beauty, a fragment of the Divine splendour, and nothing less than the infinite merits of the God-Man could have procured us these virtues or the power to practise them.

The least act of virtue performed in a spirit of faith by a soul in a state of grace is worthy of God's infinite complacence. This is why a cup of cold water given in His Name will win an eternal reward.

201. How great a proof of love, then, does he offer to God who applies himself to virtue! God will be well pleased if I am gentle, humble, charitable, patient. Oh, how happy we are in being able to perform acts which are agreeable to God! Virtue practised for its own sake is beautiful, but it is still more beautiful and more pleasing to God when it is inspired by love. The soul that remains chaste from a horror of vice, a supernatural esteem for purity, is meritorious; but the soul that practises chastity for the sake of pleasing God does better still: it increases its love and advances another step towards perfect charity. How much more rapid is this progress when the intention is wholly pure, when the soul that strives to grow in virtue does not seek its own excellence, and has no other aim than that of pleasing God! And how much more successful will be its efforts! And when virtue shall have been established upon the ashes of vice; when love shall have triumphed over the most violent passions, and evil inclinations, constantly thwarted, have lost their vigour; when the soul's inveterate enemies, so often repulsed, have been thrown into confusion; when the holy disposition

towards virtue has been strengthened and developed—how beautiful is the spectacle in God's sight! The grace which we have obtained through Our Lord's merits has triumphed. By a reflection of His beauty, Jesus has transfigured the hideousness of the soul. Vice is overthrown, all stains have disappeared, and amidst the ruins a single column rises heavenwards, bearing this luminous inscription: "Jesus has conquered."

Yes! Jesus is glorified, God is glorified, by every act of virtue. The grace which Jesus purchased by His labours has won us the victory—God's grace, His gifts, the participation in His perfections, causing virtue to be born and to increase in the faithful soul. And so in Heaven, where all is light and truth, *our virtues will be an even greater source of glory to God than they are to the soul that possesses them.*

CHAPTER XXIV

CONFORMITY TO THE WILL OF GOD

Ego quæ placita sunt ei facio semper (I do always the things that please Him).—St. John viii. 29.

§ 1. *The Importance of the Duties of our State.*

202. The conformity of our will to God's will is the virtue by which we can best prove our love for Him, or, more correctly, this conformity will be the habitual manifestation of our love. The love of conformity can be exercised everywhere and always; the most ordinary actions can be thus ennobled and sanctified. "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever else you do," says St. Paul, "do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. x. 31). The work, the occupations which constitute the duties of our state, become a source of glory to God and of merit to the Christian when they are performed joyfully and because the well-beloved Master has willed them and has imposed them upon him.

203. Wondrous and glorious is His plan, this blessed Master, this infinitely wise King of Heaven and earth; for in this plan, which was formed from all eternity, every creature has its part, its particular mission. And in order that each one may follow the path marked out for him, God orders events, He disposes circumstances, He gives special aptitudes and attractions. One has a taste for soldiering, another for medicine, this one for the Bar, that for Commerce. Divine Providence, in its wisdom, has established this diversity of tastes and aptitudes, and

social functions are thus happily distributed according to the diverse needs of humanity.

And to this variety of tastes in the natural order corresponds a no less wonderful diversity of aptitudes and attractions in the supernatural order. God does not require that all should excel equally in the same virtue. Each vocation has its needs, each position imposes different duties, and thence arises a marvellous variety, for the various virtues, variously practised, give to each Christian soul its distinctive character. In a garden the different plants, the flowers of many hues, have a beautiful effect if disposed with taste. How much more beautiful, could we but see it, is the world of souls! And yet this is but a dim representation of the infinitely more beautiful spectacle which we shall behold in Heaven. There, and far more brilliantly, will shine that multitude of souls which form such a harmonious whole here below. Nothing will tarnish their splendour. Each will give forth its radiance; their beauty will be mutually enhanced. A perfect order will reign amongst them, a most complete unity in a most wonderful variety.

204. Let us try, then, to esteem the duties of our state. What a consolation for the humblest artisan to be able to say to himself: "In the exercise of my trade, I fulfil the will of God; I glorify Him here below in the manner which He desires; I prepare myself to occupy the place which He has destined for me in Heaven, and to glorify Him for all eternity with the glory which He requires at my hands. My hard toil becomes a hymn in God's honour. While my body is bent over my tools, while my eyes are fixed upon my work, while my hands are busy, while I calculate, take measurements, draw plans, my whole being obeys Thee, O my God. All that I am is Thine; my strength is employed in Thy service; all my nature chants Thy praises." Was it not thus that the members of the Holy Family—Joseph, Mary, and Jesus—toiled at Nazareth?

However humble may be our rôle upon earth, our conformity to God's will endows it with a true nobility; and in assigning this rôle to us, God has shown, as always, His wisdom and goodness. The maker of toys for children should think himself happy to be associated with the Divine work of giving happiness, of providing innocent joys and legitimate satisfactions. Those who are engaged in the construction of our houses or the manufacture of the food that we eat or the clothes that we wear, are also associated with God's beneficent works; they are the auxiliaries of Him who, when He openeth His hand, filleth all things living with blessings (Ps. ciii. 28), who cares for our dwelling-places, our raiment, our food. Others, again, are chosen to do a higher service to their fellows—to enlighten their minds, to nourish their souls with the bread of truth, and to direct them in the way of salvation. It lies with God to assign to each one of us his special task, and it is our duty to accept lovingly that which Providence has confided to us. The wheat grows to maturity without knowing whether it will become the food of birds or of men, or the material for the Eucharistic Sacrifice. It has no preference for the one or the other of these destinies. And so, too, should man be docile to the Divine will, exhibiting a holy indifference.

Every morning, on his knees, the true Christian should receive his orders from God. "Here I am, O Lord! What dost Thou command me to do? What shall be my task this day? Shall I toil at the anvil, shall I follow the plough, or lead the contemplative life? Speak, and Thy servant will obey. Thy will is my only rule, my only food." As the Divine Lord Himself said, *Meus cibus est ut faciam voluntatem ejus qui misit me* (My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me—St. John iv. 34). Oh, sweet, substantial, fortifying food! Oh, food Divine! For is not God's will also a part of God, and to be nourished on the Divine will, is it not to be nourished by Him, to become one with Him, to be transformed into Him?

205. If the duties of our state present themselves to us as manifestations of the Divine will, with what reverent care should we not endeavour to fulfil them! Many other occupations may call to us, be more attractive to us—and these are not always idle pursuits: they may have their usefulness; but if the duties of our state are in any way sacrificed to them, they become harmful. This is so, even if they cause us to perform these duties negligently, hurriedly, and against the grain, although without omitting any essential part.

A friend would show a strange want of delicacy if he gave as a souvenir some object—I do not say ugly and repulsive, but only soiled or broken. Were he to make such a sorry present to a superior or a benefactor, he would be justly considered as wanting in respect. How, then, should God regard those who acquit themselves anyhow of the duties of their state, and show sloth or carelessness in their execution?

Our cowardice in the performance of the duties of our state often comes from the wish to enjoy the advantages of our vocation without bearing its burdens; or at any rate we try, as far as possible, to minimize the troubles that we encounter. We forget that without the spirit of self-sacrifice it is impossible to acquit ourselves well of these duties. God has put into our souls a powerful attraction for our state; He causes us to find pleasure and happiness therein; but He has left the thorn concealed in the rose, because He desires that our duty, through its very difficulty, should sanctify us the more. His designs find their accomplishment in generous hearts; and by the duties of the state, whatever they may be, souls of good-will are sanctified. Have we not seen Saints in all conditions of life? In every profession numerous opportunities for suffering and self-sacrifice occur, and as soon as a faithful and courageous soul begins to discharge all its duties with invincible love, it rises to sanctity.

206. It is by love, and not by any state of life, then, that

souls are perfected, that they become heroes and Saints. Those who pass their days in prayer and penance have certainly chosen the better part ; they have more aids to sanctification. But the labourer, bearing the burden and heat of the day and exposed to the inclemency of winter, the workman in his fatiguing labours, can also attain to heroism. If they are full of love, these can even present more acceptable offerings to God, more perfect sacrifices, than the contemplative religious whose detachment is incomplete.

Martha was rebuked by Our Lord, not because of her occupations, but on account of the too human eagerness with which she performed them. She ought to have been wholly actuated by love, casting glances of a holy jealousy upon those viands which were to have the honour of nourishing the Sacred Humanity, of being incorporated into the stainless Flesh of Him by whom the world was to be redeemed. Each step that she took, every exertion that she made, should have been as a fresh act of love, a joyful proof of her devotion. If she had been penetrated with such love as this, she would not have thought of complaining that Mary had left her to serve alone. Only too happy to be allowed to work for her Master, she would have rejoiced that she was not obliged to share with another the care of waiting upon Him. If, in the early dawn, she had received God's commands on her knees, realizing that it was He who charged her with the task of providing the feast for the nourishing of His Divine Son, she would have accepted the office thankfully, and would have performed it without anxiety. And the Divine Saviour, as He accepted from her hands the food which had been so lovingly prepared, would have perceived its supernatural fragrance, and would have recompensed her housewifely devotion by a redoubling of her faith and her love. The continuation of the Gospel history clearly shows that Magdalen's love was the greater of the two : it was she who followed Jesus to Calvary, she who sought her

Master's body after the Resurrection ; it was to Magdalen also, and not to Martha, that Our Lord deigned first of all to appear, even before showing Himself to His Apostles.

The loving heart considers, not the work, but the person who commands it. "No matter what are the labours imposed upon me," it will say, "so long as they are for my Beloved. And can He, who is Himself all love, desire anything but my good ? I will respond with all my love to His love. If I must toil and struggle, my efforts shall show how much I love Him. What matter if my body be broken with fatigue, my soul racked by suffering ? If the sweat be wrung from my brow, and my body be wounded and bleeding, I will ask my Lord to mingle His sacred sweat, His Precious Blood with mine, that my pains and my labours may have some share in the efficacy of His labours and sorrows."

§ 2. *Mary, the Model of Conformity to the Divine Will.*

207. How conformable to her natural bent was the Blessed Virgin's life in the Temple ! Employed in God's worship, she lived, as far as was then possible, the contemplative life. And now she must leave this life in order to become a wife and a mother ; she must forsake this divine occupation to engage in the cares of a house and take control of a working man's home. Did she offer any objection to this vocation ? No, certainly ; God's will was too precious to her. Because they were God's will, all occupations, the very lowest and meanest, were too noble in her eyes to allow even of a single objection presenting itself to her mind. And this wonderful Queen of Virgins, already so holy, and having attained to such a high degree of love, in no wise slackened in her progress after her marriage. While giving herself up to the humble occupations of her house, she advanced steadily in sanctity, calling forth the admiration of the Angels and delighting the Heart of God.

It was in this simple and modest life, and not in the Temple at Jerusalem, that Mary received the highest favour ever accorded to a creature. Millions of times, in Heaven and upon earth, angelic spirits and the children of men have proclaimed themselves to be God's humble servants, ready to execute His commands. *Ecce ancilla Domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum* (Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to Thy word). But none of these protestations has had the marvellous efficacy of Mary's utterance, because none other was ever made with such an abundance of love. So true is it that God values an act only according to the measure of the love that prompts it, and that no creature has ever acted with such a pure and powerful love as Mary.

§ 3. *The Union of Prayer and Action.*

208. We give God a great proof of our love when we devote ourselves attentively to our daily duties with a view of being pleasing to Him. But we must remember that if we desire to perform these duties in a truly Christian manner, we must not let ourselves become absorbed in them to the point of losing sight of God, and still less must we overload ourselves with work at the expense of recollection and the interior life. We need often to steep ourselves in prayer, in conversation with Jesus ; we must be able to leave our work and draw near to the Altar, where we may gain fresh supplies of faith and love. It is there that Jesus makes Himself felt ; there that He touches our hearts, that He enlightens our minds ; there that our piety is increased, that we find strength for the day's work and those thoughts, born of faith, which supernaturalize our actions and make them meritorious. Is it not in their daily visits to Jesus in the Tabernacle, in their assistance at the Divine Sacrifice, that true Christians find their souls' nourishment, their piety, and their strength ; that strong men, that active and devoted women, find their

rest and comfort ; and, above all, that young souls strengthen their new-born virtues ?

Quæ placita sunt ei facio semper (I do always the things that please Him—St. John vii. 29). These words of Jesus, which sum up His whole life, should be the description of our lives also, for the perfection of charity consists in the constant union of the human will with the Divine. This is the end to which all the actions of our life should tend—*to do God's will, as He wills it and because He wills it.* God wills that we should acquit ourselves diligently of the duties of our state, but not that we should perform them with a human eagerness or passion. His will is *that we should give ourselves to Him and lend ourselves only to all that is not God.* If we neglect to devote a large part of our lives to pious exercises, to prayer, we shall find it impossible to escape dissipation of mind, impossible to maintain ourselves in the habitual remembrance of God, in a state of loving union with the Beloved. The experience of too many Christians who, alas ! without any regret, sacrifice their interior life to a purely exterior one, shows this clearly. The scanty fruit, the noticeable absence of the perfect virtues, prove that they are not in the right way. The true road is that which has been followed by the Saints and all those who allow themselves to be led by the Spirit of God ; it is that where prayer and action are mingled without detriment to one another, and where we know both how to work for God and to rest with Him and in Him.

§ 4. *The Complete Immolation of the Human Will, or the Practice of Greater Perfection.*

209. Let your efforts, then, be generous, pious reader, so that you may perpetually preserve the thought of God and constantly submit your will to Him. The human will is not easily subdued ; it is tenacious and crafty, and often, even when it pretends to efface itself before the Divine

will, resorts to subterfuges, dressing itself up in false pretences in order to get its own way. You feel some natural desire, and straightway you go in search of a supernatural motive which shall make it legitimate. You feel repugnance for some useful task, and you quickly conjure up some ill consequences which might result, and are delighted to be able thus to justify your inaction. Your conscience, perhaps, warns you that your course of action is not the best, but you console yourself with the reflection that it is not actually reprehensible.

Cut short these wiles of self-will by promising Our Lord, each time that you receive Him in Holy Communion, that between two legitimate acts you will choose always, not that which is most pleasing to yourself, but the most pleasing to Him; that you will set yourself to do in all things that which seems to you the most perfect. Why, fervent souls, do you hesitate to take this generous resolution? You foresee that it will entail many sacrifices, severe privations; it will be *necessary ceaselessly to go counter to your tastes, to subdue your repugnances?* That is true. BUT IS NOT GOD SUFFICIENT FOR YOU? *Do you desire anything else here below than the happiness of pleasing Him?* By giving Him this proof of love, by constantly immolating your will in order to perform His will with a greater perfection, do you not, even in your own interests, take the wisest course? Are you not labouring as much for your own happiness as for the glory of God?

CHAPTER XXV

HUMILITY

Omnes invicem humilitatem insinuate quia Deus superbis resistit, humilibus autem dat gratiam (And do you all insinuate humility one to another, for God resisteth the proud, but to the humble He giveth grace).—1 St. Pet. v. 5.

§ 1. *The Divine Foundation of Humility.*

210. We cannot speak of all the virtues which the faithful soul should practise in order to prove his love for God; we will therefore give the preference to the most important amongst them. We have treated of conformity to the will of God because it sums up our duties towards Him. We will now study, first humility, since all our duties towards ourselves seem to come back to this, and afterwards obedience and charity, in which virtues all our duties to our neighbour are contained. Humility also contributes so powerfully to the growth of charity that it deserves to be considered separately.

211. "Humility is truth." Such is the accepted axiom amongst spiritual writers. To humble ourselves is to put God in the place which is His due, ourselves into the place belonging to a creature. Humility has no *actual* part in God, as the theologians have it—in its own form, that is to say; for humility supposes smallness and inferiority, or at least abasement. But it is eminently present in Him; which is to say that in God the most perfect dispositions are to be found—dispositions which, transported into creatures and adapting themselves to their measure,

taking in them, as the water in the vessel, the form suitable to their estate, become humility.

God is Truth. In the Blessed Trinity each Person fulfils the function proper to Him, without usurping those of the other two, and each renders to these other two Persons all the glory which is Their due. In human beings, if we may use such a material comparison, the brain which thinks, the tongue which speaks, the heart which communicates warmth and life to the whole body, fulfil each its part, exercising a mutual influence without infringing upon the functions proper to the others. The brain thinks the words which the tongue expresses; the heart is influenced by the brain, and supplies to it and to the tongue strength and movement. Between these three organs a complete harmony therefore reigns, and if each were intelligent, no one of them would envy the other's part. And how much more perfect and wonderful is the harmony which reigns between the three Divine Persons! The Father, contemplating Himself, brings forth His Word. And these two Divine Persons cannot behold themselves without love, and so they produce a substantial and living Love, which is the Holy Spirit. The Son of God, thus begotten of the Father, receiving all His perfections from Him, united to Him by a living Love, who is the Holy Ghost, renders back to His Father all that He has received from Him. He knows Him; He proclaims Him lovingly for His Father; He glorifies the Father as the Father deserves to be glorified, infinitely happy to possess, happy to be the Son of such a Father. And what we say of the Son is equally true of the Father—infinitely happy to have such a Son, and giving to this well-beloved Son all the veneration, all the glory, that He deserves. And this is true, again, of the Holy Spirit, receiving from the Father and the Son all that He possesses, happy to proceed from the one and from the other, and rendering to the Father and the Son the same infinite glory which He receives at Their hands. Such is the Divine life, always active,

always happy—a life where all is truth and perfect harmony, where each Divine Person receives all the homage that is His due, rendering back again to the other Divine Persons all Their rightful meed of glory.

212. The sentiments of justice and truth by which we pay God His dues, and are happy because we occupy our rightful place—this emotion, infinitely perfect in God, produces humility when it occurs in the creature. For the creature, if it desires to be just and true, must recognize that God is everything, itself nothing; that all strength, all virtue, all beauty and all goodness come from God, and that in itself it is only weakness and wretchedness—or, rather, that it is nothing. And if the creature wishes to abide in justice and truth, it cannot fail to realize God's greatness; and then, instinctively comparing this infinite splendour with its own insignificance, it will be led on to abase and annihilate itself. It will see that God is all-holy, and itself sin; that God is justice and goodness, itself injustice and selfishness; that God is the God of peace and mercy, itself all anger and malice; that God is truth, and self nothing but falsehood and duplicity. And the greater its enlightenment, the more vividly this contrast will strike it; the fuller the knowledge of God, the more complete becomes self-knowledge. If, on the other hand, it is self-complacent, too much pleased or too much occupied with self, it is a sign that its knowledge of God is extremely imperfect.

§ 2. *Jesus, the Word Incarnate, the Model of Heroic Humility.*

213. Hitherto we have depicted merely ordinary humility; but there is another degree, more difficult and more meritorious, which consists in abasing self even more than our deserts require. And thus we do homage to the truth; for in humbling ourselves we exalt truth; truth receives the dignity that we lose, the glory of which

we voluntarily deprive ourselves. We must direct our gaze to Heaven if we would know, not the principle and foundation and groundwork only, but also the perfect model of this kind of humility. It is the God-Man, the Incarnate Word, of whom St. Paul wrote: *Humiliavit semetipsum* (He humbled Himself even to annihilation) *semetipsum exinanivit* (Phil. ii. 7, 8).

The Word from all eternity rejoiced to glorify His Father in the bosom of the Holy Trinity; but this same ardour of love which led God to communicate His gifts exteriorly, to pour them forth into a lower world through creation, impelled the Divine Word to glorify His Father outwardly in a manner worthy of Him. He sought, then, in this created world for a Tabernacle in which He could imprison Himself in order to make reparation for the offences committed against His Father and to glorify Him in the name of His creatures. It was the Eternal Father, from whom the Word received His Being and His perfections, who communicated to Him this thought, this desire for humiliation; and the Holy Spirit gave life to this desire, which the Word with infinite joy accepted. And is not this acceptance of a humiliation vast beyond all possibilities of comparison, the most admirable act of humility which we can conceive?

But the greatness of this humiliation was further enhanced by the fact that in this state which He accepted, the Incarnate Word, taking a finite nature, knew that He could not honour His Father in accordance with His merits. The acts of adoration, of submission and love performed by Our Saviour's human soul were, it is true, clothed with an infinite dignity, were of infinite worth, because they appertained to a Divine Person; but they were none the less limited in themselves: they were not equal to the boundless magnificence of God, whom they glorified. The Word in His Human Nature could not put forth all His attributes, or exercise one of the sublime acts which He exercises in the bosom of the Blessed Trinity. His consent

to place Himself in this comparatively powerless state must call forth all our admiration, and it is here that the annihilation which St. Paul speaks of is most astonishingly manifested; it is in this that Jesus becomes the perfect model of humility.

214. The Word in becoming Flesh accomplished, then, an act of sublime humility; it was thus that He inaugurated His earthly life, and He continued as He had begun. His life here below was an uninterrupted series of the acts of this lovely virtue. He lived in a continual state of annihilation of all that nourishes human pride—natural activity, honours, reputation, men's esteem.

Natural activity is, in effect, too often the support of self-love. We are pleased with the judgment, the penetration, the energy, that we put into our good works; we are delighted to bring these natural qualities into play. And grace, hampered by this natural activity, produces acts of lesser purity and worth. Moreover, those who act thus are less faithful in rendering to God the glory which should redound to Him from all man's works. But there was none of this natural activity in Our Lord's case; Nature always left the way clear, in order that grace might accomplish its mission. Our Lord's human will was ever in perfect submission to the Divine will, never outrunning it, never starting aside, never mingling with it anything of the purely natural, but accepting each impulsion of grace; always following this supernatural influence, and conforming itself completely thereto. Not that in Him free-will was stifled, or even constrained; but it was exercised in the acceptance of the Father's good pleasure. Far from acting in opposition to, or apart from, the supernatural impulse of the Holy Spirit in His soul, He accepted it lovingly and with a complete submission of His natural will. Our Lord's cry in Gethsemani, when He said, *Non mea voluntas sed tua fiat* (Not My will, but Thine be done—St. Matt. xxvi. 39), is the summing up of His whole life.

And if He constantly renounced that natural activity of which men are so proud, He relinquished no less heroically all that esteem, consideration, and reputation for which we are so eager. The humiliating circumstances of His birth at Bethlehem, the flight into Egypt, the hidden life at Nazareth, the shame and ignominy of Gethsemani, of the Prætorium, and Calvary—all these facts, which we have but to call to mind, show the thirst for abasement and annihilation that consumed Him, and prove how He yearned to humble Himself that His Father might be exalted.

§ 3. *The Practice of Humility.*

215. We know the perfect Model of humility. It is in the contemplation of this Model, so worthy of admiration and love, that the Saints have come to understand the value of humility, and have applied themselves to reproduce in their own lives those mysteries of abasement in their Saviour's life which have touched their hearts so deeply. Seeing the profound humiliations of the God-Man, whose superhuman greatness and dignity they better than any others understood, they thought that they themselves could never descend low enough. Being accustomed, in the radiance of the light which was communicated to them, to contemplate the infinite beauty, the infinite holiness, the infinite majesty, of the Divine Word ; being enamoured of His greatness and goodness, unable to turn without disgust to the consideration of their own wretchedness (which this same light of grace revealed in all its hideousness)—what must they have felt at the sight of their Jesus humiliated, while they themselves were often esteemed, praised, glorified ? This explains those expressions of self-contempt, which at times almost savour of exaggeration, their disdain, their hatred of human praise and all that saintly folly of humility, which we meet with in their lives.

216. You Christians who read these lines, it may be that you have not yet received at God's hands that high

and precious illumination of grace which alone can give perfect humility. You cannot acquire this light by your own efforts, but you can obtain it from above. Pray for it without ceasing; refuse to "let God go" until He has bestowed it upon you; pray ardently, continuously, undauntedly. In asking for humility you ask for a whole spiritual fortune; it is well worth years of prayer. And then, to prove the sincerity of your desire for this great virtue, and to dispose yourself to receive it, practise it as far as in you lies. Be small in your own eyes; penetrate yourself with your own nothingness, your faultiness, always contrasting your littleness with God's infinite greatness. "Lose thyself in My greatness," said Our Lord to Blessed Margaret Mary, "and see that thou never come forth from thence."

Of ourselves we are nothing. "If any man think himself to be something, he deceiveth himself," saith St. Paul (Gal. vi. 3). We were created out of nothing; during an eternity we were not, and had we continued in nothingness, nought would have been lacking in the world. And we only preserve our borrowed being by God's continual action. If He ceased to sustain us, if He abandoned us to ourselves for one single instant, we should be annihilated, even as the flame vanishes when the torch is extinguished. Wretched creatures that we are, conscious always of the void beneath our feet!

We can do nothing of ourselves. *Without Me ye can do nothing* (St. John xv. 5). Without God's concurrence we could not so much as move our little finger; not a word could issue from our lips; not a thought could arise in our minds, not a desire in our hearts, not a resolution in our will. Still more are we incapable of any supernatural work, for *No man can say, the Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost* (1 Cor. xii. 3).

But even with God's aid how great is our weakness! If impelled towards good, we stand motionless; or if at first we accept the impulse of grace, a mere nothing is suffi-

cient to arrest us, to benumb us. Some phantom of the imagination, a chimerical fear, an evil counsel, a suggestion of the Devil, the most irrational motive, paralyzes us, and God must begin all over again to thrust us forward, to multiply His graces, to redouble His care. Feebleness, torpor, impotence—that is what we are !

217. And what shall we say of our faults, our ingratitude, towards the greatest of benefactors, of our insolences towards our Sovereign Master ? He has pardoned us, but that is no reason why we should not humble ourselves because of them. And, besides, the evidences of our sins remain ; they will only disappear in proportion as we do penance in this world and in the next. It is true that if we consider the supernatural gifts which adorn our souls, we can say that we are beautiful with a Divine beauty, that God can take pleasure in us. But this beauty, which continues as long as we do not forfeit sanctifying grace, can be tarnished ; the gold remains unchanged, but we overlay it with impurities.

When an infant is disfigured with a milk-rash, the mother's affection does not wane. She still sees all the baby charms ; she takes pleasure in the bright eyes, the delicate limbs, the pretty ways. But she sighs to see the hideous eruption which disfigures its face. This is a picture of ourselves, but with a difference, and one which is entirely to our disadvantage : the child is guiltless of the infirmity that obscures its beauty, while we have caused those crusts of sin which deform our souls. Yes, God loves us still with an infinite love, but these vestiges of sin displease Him, and He views them with horror.

And further, these things are an obstacle to His favours. What might we not be to-day were it not that our sins have caused the miscarriage, in part at any rate, of God's merciful designs upon our souls ? To what a degree of love might we not have attained, and what a wealth of good might we not have wrought to those about us ?

These are the thoughts upon which we should constantly dwell. If our reflections fail to win for us the full light which we need in order to become truly humble, they are at any rate necessary for the attainment of the first degrees of humility and to prepare us to receive it in a more perfect measure at God's hands.

218. Is it necessary to add that God will not grant us this perfect humility unless we set ourselves to produce acts of this virtue, while every act of sincere humility obtains quickly from God a grace by which it is augmented? *Ama nesciri et pro nihilo reputari*, says the *Imitation* (Book i., chap. iii.). Love to be unknown and forgotten, to be counted as naught; fly everything that flatters self-love; rejoice when you can be obscure, hidden from men's eyes, and can give yourself up to humble work. Regard it as a joy to be able sometimes to yield your rights, to obey unjust requirements uncomplainingly, to respond to ill-treatment by gentleness and kindness. Be ever simple, upright, straightforward, without mental reservations, walking in truth. Oh, how excellent a way of practising humility is this, and one that is rarer than might be supposed! "I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children walk in truth," said St. John (3 St. John i. 4). To walk in truth is to stand fast in the true doctrine; but it is also to be true in all our conduct—not to deceive ourselves, nor to deceive others by concealing, under specious pretexts, our own proud or selfish intentions.

Be humble, never performing your actions to be seen of men. What is the source of the preoccupations, the cares of so many pious persons? Why that fear of not doing things well, which pursues them and destroys recollection? It is that they dread criticism and blame. If they only thought of pleasing God, without considering the opinion of men, they would preserve their peace and their union with God.

Do not fear humiliations; they are necessary in order to lead the soul to humility, and Providence will most

certainly send them if you pray heartily to become humble. Humiliations are signal favours, most salutary blessings. If Nature shrinks from them, if our inferior part suffers, our superior part—that in which faith reigns—should rejoice. Without humiliations you could never be humble ; by them you become like unto Jesus ; you receive the treatment which was meted out to Him. By them you can expiate your faults, obtain great graces, acquire precious merits. It would be pure ingratitude if for each humiliation you failed to show your lively gratitude to God.

§ 4. *The Advantage of Humility.*

219. O humility, sublime virtue, how pleasing art thou to the Heart of God, exercising over Him an invincible attraction : *The more thou dost withdraw into thy nothingness*, said Our Lord to Blessed Margaret Mary, *the more doth My greatness abase itself to find Thee. I can in no wise*, says Our Lord again, speaking to St. Gertrude, *resist from following her who, by the powerful attraction of humility, has carried away My Divine Heart with her.* Humility is the elder sister of suffering ; it proceeds from the same bosom of God, and it is greater, more beautiful, more necessary than suffering. It can exist apart from sin ; the Angels in their time of trial did not suffer, but they humbled themselves. It exists in Heaven, where the elect, who no longer suffer, are more humble than ever before.

220. Humility is the necessary foundation of the other virtues, for whosoever will lead a virtuous life must first establish himself in truth—that is to say, he must set God and self in their rightful places ; for then only can he perform acts which shall be pleasing to God. The most admirable acts of virtue and the most apparently perfect works are displeasing to the Almighty if the heart is lacking in humility. The other virtues destroy, little by little, the obstacles which hinder God's reign in the soul and conduct it by degrees to the knowledge of God and of itself.

Humility, when it is sincere and perfect, destroys all these obstacles at one blow, giving the poor human creature a clear perception of its nothingness, a deep conviction of its powerlessness, and it straightway renounces everything which proceeds from self, its own faults included. God reigns in the humble heart as He reigns in Heaven, for all things there are subject to Him ; but He withdraws Himself, or at any rate operates less powerfully, when the creature seeks to act by itself and delights in its own strength. It is humility, therefore, which holds the soul united to God and makes the exercise of the other virtues possible.

Humility brings forth patience. The truly humble man considers all his trials to be just. He believes himself to be unworthy of any consolations; the more he receives, the more he humbles himself. But he thinks himself deserving of chastisements, and always feels that he has merited greater tribulations than those which God sends to him. And he is happy to be able to resemble his Master ; he cannot even feel displeased with those who, by their unjust treatment, their undeserved reproaches or base calumnies, procure this happiness for him.

And thence proceeds the imperturbable peace of the humble. What should they fear when neither tribulations nor humiliations trouble them ? And this peace overflows round about them. They remain calm and at rest, gentle, and at the same time firm ; and so others approach them confidently, and come to them for help and counsel, encouragement and comfort.

221. The humble are mighty against Hell. The devils in their pride detest them, knowing that Our Lord most powerfully protects the humble ; but they also fear them, having so frequently been repulsed and vanquished by them ; but they can see no way of harming them, for all their wiles are unmasked, all their attacks repelled.

It is easy for the truly humble to preserve union with God. Continually quelling the motions of Nature, turning

away from all that is opposed to the Divine action within them, they receive uninterruptedly the highest graces, by means of which they think constantly of God and produce acts of ardent love for Him. Their lives are, as it were, a prelude of Heaven—that Heaven where, seeing now all unveiled God's powerful action in their souls, communicating to them intelligence, love, happiness and life, the elect can take no further delight in themselves, but are made one with God in one uninterrupted act of contemplation, gratitude, and love.

CHAPTER XXVI

OBEDIENCE

Obedite præpositis vestris, et subjacete eis (Obey your prelates, and be subject to them).—HEB. xiii. 17.

§ 1. *Man: a Social Creature.*

222. IF we love God, we shall also love His handiwork; we shall lovingly accept all that He, in His wisdom and goodness, has established. God has made man a social being. In the majority of the inferior orders the individual is sufficient for himself. Animals, save in some rare species, do not depend upon a number of their fellows for the satisfaction of their needs; but the advantages which accrue to mankind from society are so great that they could not be dispensed with. The society, then, is from God; laws, without which it could not subsist, are imposed by Him, and should be regarded as the expression of His will.

If these laws were faithfully observed, how beautiful a thing would human society be! What perfect order would reign on earth! The world would be like Heaven, for Heaven is a perfect society; there the hierarchies of the Saints are disposed in accordance with the order which God has decreed; each continues in his proper place, neither jealous of nor impeding, but rather assisting, the work of another when charged to do so. Do not the higher Angels transmit to the lower the light which they receive from God? Each order has its mission; each one of the Angels his task, which he performs without ever trespassing upon another's domain. To some Angelic spirits

is committed the office of watching over the material world; to others that of caring for souls; others, again—and from Daniel's vision (Dan. vii. 10) it would seem that these are much the most numerous—abide in the presence of the Most High, occupied solely in doing homage to Him. With what love does not each one perform the task allotted to him, and how resplendent in the abode of the Blessed must be this perfect harmony! How manifest must be the Divine Wisdom that has established this wonderful order!

Daily, and many times daily, we pray that God's will may be done on earth as it is in Heaven. If this prayer were always ardent and sincere, more especially if we were always faithful in the performance of our duty to our brothers—if we avoided, as far as it depended upon us, all that could disturb the order willed by God, human society would be more like that of the Angels, the earth would more nearly resemble Heaven.

223. The first of our social obligations is to allow our neighbours to perform their duty without supplanting them or interfering with them, without making their tasks irksome by our unfriendly judgments, our sharp criticisms. Popular wisdom demands that nobody should occupy himself with things which do not concern him; but even those who loudly proclaim this principle and are keen to see it observed in their own case, often sin in this particular themselves. Modern manners, the reading of newspapers, which from necessity, and often from duty, brand all evil and injustice, and condemn what they consider reprehensible, have accustomed us to pronounce judgment upon everything. And yet it is a disorder to mix ourselves up in other people's affairs; it is the source of much dissension, of antipathies and discords. How much more harmonious it would be if each one were solely attentive to his duty, and only turned his attention to his neighbour when called upon to give him assistance! Are not the duties of our state sufficient to occupy all the powers of the soul?

Those who understand their importance and extent, those who see the expression of the Divine will in the duties imposed upon them, who, having a high idea of their own mission, fear lest they should not fulfil it aright—these do not let their eyes stray to their neighbours' vineyards. It is, rather, the negligent who are the most given to fault-finding. These are they of whom Jesus Christ said that they perceive the mote in their brother's eye, but not the beam which is in their own.

§ 2. *Submission to Authority.*

224. All society rests upon one necessary foundation, which is authority. God, who has established the human society, has chosen that men should be subordinate one to the other—that some should command, and others obey. This is why it is written that *all authority is of God*. It is more than ever useful in these days to remember this principle. Those who now exercise the civil authority in France have made such an abominable use of it, they have passed so many laws which are contrary to the law of God, have taken so many steps to destroy the reign of Jesus Christ, that it is every Christian's duty to denounce their misdeeds, and to labour with all his strength (the laws themselves admit this right) to overthrow their power by exposing their harmfulness and impiety. Charity towards the sheep demands that we should try to scare away the wolf when he is threatening to devour them.

The civil authorities, in revolt against God, have only their own perversity to thank for the opposition offered to them by the true servants of Christ, and would to God that this opposition were still more vigorous! For in thus fighting a Government which tramples God's rights and men's consciences under foot, the Christian is playing the part of a good citizen; he is doing a signal service to his country; he is striving to safeguard the real conception of power, which is only a delegation of the infinitely just

power of Almighty God ; he is saving, so far as in him lies, his country from anarchy and ruin.

But still this unnecessary warfare with authorities, in which Christians are bound to engage, may have unfortunate consequences. Has it not, in fact, helped to spread abroad amongst us the spirit of indiscipline and revolt ? Everywhere we hear complaints that authority is no longer treated with obedience and respect, even when it has not ceased to deserve them. Do not those authorities against whom no grave charges can be brought suffer from the discredit which attaches itself so justly to certain other officials ? But do you, Christian souls, delight in obeying those whom God has set over you, whenever these orders are not in opposition to the Divine law ; show them a real respect ; pray for them, that their difficult task may be made easier and their heavy burden lightened.

Happy he who knows how to see God in his superiors, who recognizes and reveres the portion of the Divine authority which is deposited in them. If some fault appears in their private conduct, he understands that he must not publish it again. From the first pages of the Bible we are shown, in Sem and Japheth, an example of the respect due to our superiors. Noe, their father, having gathered in the vintage for the first time, was overcome by the effects of this drink, the potency of which was unknown to him ; and Cham, his youngest son, who found him lying in a state of unconscious nudity, at once went to relate what he had seen to his brothers. He wanted to make merry at his father's expense. But his two brothers, going backwards, covered their sleeping father, and therefore Sem and Japheth received a blessing, the fruits of which are still enjoyed by their descendants, while the posterity of Cham still suffers the chastisement which fell upon their ancestor.

225. Amongst superiors, priests hold a place apart. The Sacrament by which they become priests is styled Holy Order, and this is doubtless because it is the basis of all the

social order ; without the priesthood, where would religion be ? and without religion, where would be society ? No superior can represent God as can the priest. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are the powers communicated to him high above the powers conferred by God upon magistrates and Princes. To absolve, to offer the Holy Sacrifice, to distribute the Body and Blood of Christ, to open to souls the gates of Heaven—how great a marvel ! And it is not only a fragment of His authority that Almighty God has given to His priests : it is a wonderful delegation of His omnipotence.

A respect, then, for the priesthood, a devotion to God's ministers, will be one of the most sure signs that Divine love reigns in the soul. Everything that is done for the priest is done directly for God ; all that is done against him directly touches God Himself. This is the explanation of the blessings which God grants to the faithful who are devoted to their priests, and of the chastisements which descend, often in a visible and startling fashion, upon those who molest them. *He that receiveth you receiveth Me*, said the Son of God to the seventy-two disciples ; *he that heareth you heareth Me ; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me* (St. Luke x. 16). *Touch ye not My anointed, and do no evil to My prophets* (Ps. civ. 15).

226. This thought, which leads us to see God in all superiors, makes obedience as easy as it is meritorious. Whatever may be the good qualities or defects of our superiors, whether they be full of tenderness or severe to the point of harshness and even injustice, it is God who speaks when they command ; to obey them is to make an act of love to God. At his general's orders, a brave soldier will perform the most difficult feats ; he will hasten forward unhesitatingly to certain death. When the cuirassiers at Reischoffen, the Pontifical Zouaves at Patay, received the order to charge, they knew that by throwing themselves in their small numbers upon the serried ranks of the enemy they were going to their death. But not a man held

back ; they became heroes through love of their country. So the love of God transforms the perfectly obedient man into a true hero. His superior says, " Forward!" and he departs without giving a thought to the discomforts, the difficulties of the way. God wills it, and that is sufficient for him. God wills it, and therefore his obedience is prompt and joyous. To him who loves God it is sweet to do His will.

To obey is to sacrifice that to which of all our possessions we cling most—our liberty and our will. Sometimes, when obedience extends to the least details of life, it becomes a perpetual martyrdom to human nature ; but the martyrdom is sweet to the soul filled with the love of God. With eyes fixed upon Jesus, who consecrated thirty years of His life to teaching us this virtue—Jesus, who was obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross—the soul also finds its meat in the accomplishment of the Divine will, and is happy to see this Almighty will thus surely expressed in the orders of its superiors.

CHAPTER XXVII

BROTHERLY LOVE

Ante omnia autem mutuam in vobismetipsis caritatem continuam habentes, quia caritas operit multitudinem peccatorum (But before all things have a constant mutual charity among yourselves, for charity covereth a multitude of sins).—1 St. Pet. iv. 8.

§ 1. *The Foundation of Charity.*

227. To see God in our superiors is the surest way of feeling respectful and submissive with regard to them; to see in our equals souls formed in God's image is the true, the only mode of always feeling sentiments of Christian charity towards them. Yes, this man, this woman, that neighbour for whom you feel such a strong aversion, of whom you have often, perhaps, had to complain—remember that they are God's children, bought by Jesus Christ, who has poured out all His Blood for them; that they are the brethren, the coheirs of your sweet Saviour, the living tabernacles of the adorable Trinity; or, even, should they be in a state of sin, say to yourself that they are predestined to grace, that God desires to pardon them, to enrich them with His love, to make them partakers of His own life, His happiness and His glory throughout eternity.

How powerfully this thought promotes a love for our neighbour, and makes us understand the truth of the words which the Holy Spirit spoke by the mouth of the beloved Apostle: *If any man say I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar* (1 St. John iv. 20). One day, not far distant, we shall be brought to love all those round

about us—those who, perhaps, make us suffer—and how strong, how enduring, will our love then be!

Twin brothers, leading the same life in their father's house, in their games and occupations have doubtless numerous small dissensions, childish disputes about trifles. If they meet twenty years later after an enforced separation, they do not think of these little early quarrels, which would appear so ridiculous to them, but with what joy and love do they now rush into each other's arms! In Heaven, according to St. Paul's comparison (1 Cor. xiii. 11), we shall be as adults who have put away childish things, and how futile will then seem all those causes which divided us here below! Will not even the sorrows which we have caused each other serve as occasions of merit and for the augmentation of our happiness? In those who were least congenial to us on earth we shall then find nothing to offend us any more; all their defects will have been done away with, all their sins consumed by the fires of Purgatory; only their good qualities will remain—their faith, their love for God—those supernatural virtues, shining now with a yet greater brilliancy, will make them beautiful with a Divine beauty in our eyes. God will be visible in them, for He will be in us all—*erit Deus omnia in omnibus*—and He will communicate to them charms and attractions by which our hearts will be enraptured. Yes, we shall love them with a love of which no earthly love can give us any idea; and this love will be eternal. Why, then, do we not love them also on earth?

228. Let us love them for God's sake—love them as God loves them; let us love them for Jesus, and as He loves them. *This is My commandment*, said Our Lord, *that you love one another as I have loved you* (St. John xv. 12). *A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another as I have loved you* (St. John xiii. 34). What a perfect Model of love is Our Divine Saviour! He disparaged no one, He spoke ill of no one; He bore even with those whose faults must have greatly displeased Him. He loved even

those who put Him to shame, who withstood and persecuted Him. He did not curse His executioners ; He did not refuse the kiss of Judas. And still, in the Blessed Sacrament, He shields by His absolute silence all those other Judases who, by their sacrilegious Communions, force Him to enter into their unclean hearts, and deliver Him to the Devil. He becomes the Servant of all, that He may minister to all for their good. To make the children of men Saints and happy for ever—this is His ambition ; that eternal bliss may be their portion, that His Father may be eternally glorified by them—this is His sole desire. To attain this end He has spared nothing ; He has given His Blood, His life ; He has not excluded from His love even those implacable enemies who have treated and still treat Him so unworthily. Them, too, He strives to vanquish by pouring out His love upon them, overwhelming them with benefits, suffering and dying for them. This is true love. It was from His Father, who is all love, that Jesus learnt this devotion ; for He has told us that whatever He has heard from His Father He has made known unto us : *Omnia quæcumque audivi a Patre meo, nota feci vobis* (St. John xv. 15).

§ 2. *Charity Indulgent, but without Weakness.*

229. We should love as Jesus loved, by striving to make all those with whom we live happy and holy. And the first thing to do for our neighbour's happiness is to try to avoid ever causing him pain. Before everything, let us be careful to refrain from robbing our brethren of a possession the loss of which would afflict them more than any other—I mean their reputation. When it is a question of their good name we should especially remember the Gospel maxim : *As you would that men should do to you, do you also to them in like manner* (St. Luke vi. 31). We are exceedingly jealous of our own good name ; nothing is so painful as a wound to our reputation. How, then, is it that we attack our brother's reputation so lightly ? Even

the thought of the detriment that we do to ourselves does not restrain us, for we harm ourselves even more than we injure them. For in proportion as we deprive our brethren of the good esteem in which they were held by men we ourselves lose the esteem of God.

Those, then, who expose their neighbour's secret faults are gravely culpable, while those who interpret unfavourably intentions of which they know nothing are still more reprehensible. "I cannot help seeing things that are quite palpable," they will say, in order to excuse their severe judgments; but even so we need not, and we must not, judge. You suppose that a certain person's conduct has seemed as reprehensible to him as it appears to you, and that he has therefore acted from wrong motives. But if this supposition is not evident, you have no right to accept it; you commit a sin if you do so, and a still greater sin if you communicate your views to others.

When our neighbour's faults are public property, we can mention them without any actual wrong, but charity is often wounded thereby. Our love for our neighbour is promoted by a consideration of his good points and supernatural qualities, those things by which the Heart of God is well pleased. If we ignore his virtues and turn our attention and that of others also upon his defects, if we place in high relief all that displeases and shocks us, we lessen all feelings of affection for him in our neighbours' hearts and so wound the tender virtue of charity.

230. But if we should keep silence as to our neighbour's faults and bear with them, we should on no account encourage them. We must not like his defects, his weaknesses and his vices; we should not foster his self-love or his vanity by misplaced approbation or flattery, nor should we strengthen his antipathies or excite his irritation by echoing his criticisms and complaints. We should not urge him on to dissipation, or aid him in the satisfaction of his sensuality or love of comfort; these are gaping wounds which we must not enlarge, but endeavour to heal. To

encourage evil, to strengthen our neighbour's defects, is a culpable and a very common weakness ; it is a diabolic counterfeit of the Divine charity.

But is it always possible to heal our neighbour's wounds ? Reproaches almost invariably irritate and do not cure. It is, of course, not always possible to tend, and more still to heal, these wounds ; but well-ordered charity often makes it a duty to attempt this task, and the onus of correction imposes itself forcibly upon those whose mission it is to watch over their brethren. They would much rather be silent ; but let them remember that they who, *without committing sin, fail to strive with all their strength to destroy this enemy of God and of mankind, themselves become blameworthy and incur grave responsibilities ; and if, on the other hand, they do violence to themselves for the sake of fulfilling this duty, they gain more merit in God's sight than they would by the most severe austerities.* But let them take care, if they are superiors, to mingle a loving counsel with their reprimands ; or if they are dealing with their equals, let them show prudence and gentleness ; let them compel the culprit to see that their admonitions proceed only from a zeal for God's glory and a keen interest in his soul. Why were the Saints so strong in their conflicts with sin ? We see plainly that they did not seek themselves ; they were not actuated by a thirst for their own glory or satisfaction. Their firmness had nothing in it of passion or prejudice ; they had none of the hardness of certain Christians whose bitter zeal is as much, or more, the fruit of Nature than of grace.

§ 3. *The Forgiveness of Offences.*

231. To hinder the committal of offences against God is an excellent work, but we ought to show ourselves as indulgent with regard to offences against ourselves as we are sensitive concerning those which are directed against Him. For we shall often have to bear things from our neighbours,

and we shall be tempted to retaliate, to repay attack for attack, one bad turn for another. But instead of yielding to these natural instincts, let us strive to follow Our Lord's example and return good for evil. *If thy enemy be hungry, give him to eat; if he thirst, give him to drink,* and so kindle in his heart the fire of charity, even against his will. *Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good* (Rom. xii. 20, 21).

If we meet an injustice, a wrong done to us, with all the strength of our indignation, of our impatience, or with the artifices of our wounded self-love, there will be a clash of passions; and from the conflict of human passion only evil can result. The cause of our hurt and irritation is nearly always some consequence of sin: it is either an obstinate will, which expects everything to go down before it; or it is a man who is a slave to his own pride or vanity; or one who wishes to consult his own tastes at other people's expense, who tries to impose his likes and dislikes upon them and to compel them to yield to his caprices. But the evil caused by sin is not to be remedied by another evil, by another sin; it can only be cured by the good, which is God, and to pour out our love upon our neighbour is to pour God out upon him; it is to cover the human with the Divine, to submerge the evil in the good.

For evil is to be found amongst our brethren; the melancholy effects of sin are everywhere apparent in them, and it is impossible that we should not suffer at their hands. But evil is also in our own selves; sin bears its poisoned fruits in us, and our brethren cannot fail to experience its results. We suffer, then, and we are the cause of suffering; and this thought should make us indulgent and kind. *Brethren,* says the Apostle, *if a man be overtaken in any fault, you, who are spiritual, instruct such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ* (Gal. vi. 1, 2).

§ 4. *The Gift of Self and the Gift of God to Our Neighbour.*

232. *For with the same measure that you shall mete withal,* in your judgments and in your deeds of charity, *it shall be measured to you again. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you shall be forgiven. Give, and it shall be given to you; good measure, and pressed down and shaken together and running over, shall they give into your bosom* (St. Luke vi. 37, 38). Give, then, and, first of all, give your own selves. Jesus made Himself our Servant; do you therefore become the servant of your brethren. This is the counsel of St. Paul: *Servite invicem.* Jesus has washed His disciples' feet to teach us that we ought also to wash one another's feet (St. John xiii. 14); to render mutual services, without being afraid of lowering ourselves; and, as our Divine Master tells us again, without expecting any return (*nihil inde sperantes*); do good and lend, hoping for nothing thereby (St. Luke vi. 35), following the example of the Almighty, who does good for the sake of good, and who will take upon Himself to reward us. "But I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls," says St. Paul (2 Cor. xii. 15). Yes, all that we possess, and, best of all, ourselves also; my possessions, my time, my health, my life—I will give all for the sake of souls. This is the formula of true charity, admirably expressed by the great Apostle.

233. Give yourselves, then; but, what is better still, give God; this is the perfect gift. If you are able to fill yourself with God, the thought of God, His light, His burning love, you will radiate God, you will give Him out to those around you. Every supernatural virtue is a participation of God; to exhale virtue, faith, Christian sweetness, Christian devotion, is to diffuse God.

It is not your money only, your possessions, your services that you must give; you must communicate your spirit of faith, your sentiments of Divine love. Give God

by your example; give Him by your words. If your whole conduct speaks of God; if your advice, your words of encouragement, all your language breathes of Him; if in seeing you, hearing you, witnessing the effects of your devotion, your brethren are led to draw nearer to God, to be filled more full of the Divine love, you will have given them a gift surpassing all other gifts.

And then God will give Himself to you again; you will find in Him all that you have given. To those who do not give God He does not give Himself. Is not this why so many Christian souls do not receive as much as they expect from Him? They have been severe, narrow, unfair in their appreciations, full of bitterness and sharpness in their feelings, hard of speech, cold and perhaps selfish in their conduct; and then they are astonished that God does not show Himself to them as the God of all consolation. How much aridity, darkness, and impotence in prayer is the result of a want of charity! God treats us as we treat our brothers; while, on the other hand, *he that loveth his brother abideth in the light* (1 St. John ii. 10). He may have his interior trials, his times of dryness; but, enlightened and strengthened by God, he humbles himself and is at peace.

234. Give out God to your own detriment, even at the expense of Nature, by suffering in order to win a more abundant virtue for the just, and for sinners the grace of conversion.

What a great and consoling mystery is that of the Communion of Saints, teaching us that by our works, and especially by our sufferings, we can obtain the salvation or the sanctification of souls! It is true that God has no need of men. He could dispense with our aid, but He does not will to do so. On the contrary, He wills to associate us with this, the most sublime of all His works (if we can speak of degrees of perfection in the works of God), or, at any rate, that one in which His power, His wisdom, His goodness, and His love shine out with the greatest splendour.

What an honour is done to the creature when God admits it to a share in this sublime work, when He allows Himself to be aided by the creature ; when He, who by an act of His will, called the world out of nothingness—He, the All-Powerful, says to weakness and nothingness : " Come to My aid. I have offered My graces ; they have been refused. I have knocked at the door of My children's hearts, and they have not opened to Me. My goodness is fettered by this obstinacy ; My justice is trembling in the balance, and if nothing comes to arrest it, it must descend and strike. Go, seek out that sinner ; speak to him in My Name ; I will make use of thy words to enlighten and to touch him ; but, above all, suffer for him, sacrifice thyself, immolate thyself. Thy expiations will hold back the arm of My justice which is ready to smite—will break the bonds by which My loving mercies were imprisoned. It will obtain other graces more powerful than those which this poor sinner has already received. And the blind man will behold the light ; he will bend his once rebel will, and thou shalt thus share with Me the glory of having saved thy brother.

" And how I shall love thee—thee to whom I shall owe the return of an erring child ! How I will recompense thee for all thy sufferings ! With what a glory shall I surround thee ! With what delights shall I inebriate thee, in the abode of eternal bliss, for each of the souls whom thou hast helped to sanctify, for each of the sinners whom thou shalt have brought back again to Me, thy God !"

CHAPTER XXVIII

AFFECTIVE LOVE—PRAYER

Orationi instate, vigilantes in ea in gratiarum actione (Be instant in prayer, watching in it with thanksgiving).—Col. iv. 2.

235. The Canticle of Canticles, that song of hearts smitten with a holy love, shows us the Spouse seeking anxiously for the Bridegroom. *I sought him, and I found him not. I will rise, and will go about the city: in the streets and the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth. I sought him, and I found him not. The watchmen who keep the city found me: "Have you seen him whom my soul loveth?" When I had a little passed by them I found him whom my soul loveth. I held him, and I will not let him go* (Cant. iii. 1-4). All God's perfect friends are aware of a need to prove their love by their works, their sacrifices and their sufferings; but they also long to rest in the Beloved, to pass sweet moments with Him, to rejoice in His presence, and to pour out their hearts into the Heart of God.

O holy aspiration! Happy they who experience it; happy they who seek God thus ardently, who go out to find Him, determined to overcome all obstacles, never to turn aside, never to stop until they have reached their end.

But which is the way that leads to this possession of God? The way of prayer, the way of contemplation; for it is in prayer, in contemplation, that this intimate union is established—this union of joy, as the *Imitation* calls it—by which love rejoices and is increased.

§ 1. *Vocal Prayer.*

236. Vocal prayer is the manner of prayer that we engage in at the outset of the spiritual life, and many persons seem hardly to be aware of the existence of any other. This vocal prayer is of great merit, provided that its rules are properly observed and that we pray with the requisite dispositions. Our Lord warned His disciples not to imitate the heathen, who think that they are more likely to be heard through much speaking (Matt. vi. 7). Some pious persons concern themselves with the number rather than with the sense of their prayers. They often speak many words, while praying very little. They have taken, not the direct way to God, but a side path, and they thus lose themselves, and never arrive at their goal. And might we not say the same of certain communities that are always ready to take up new devotions, adding litanies to litanies, and this very often at the expense of real prayer, where no one is allowed to engage in any exercise without being tied down with formulas and obligatory methods ; and so souls become cramped, and real piety is rather stifled than promoted.

237. And yet vocal prayer, when it proceeds from a heart all on fire with love, can lead the soul to the possession of God ; few words are then required, for, as the rod in the hand of Moses struck the rock in Horeb, so each utterance goes straight to the Heart of God, causing the streams of mercy and goodness to gush forth. A few short utterances can thus produce more effect than a long-drawn-out but languid mental prayer. And if, while words succeed each other—during the Divine Office, for example, or the recitation of the Rosary—the soul continues to proffer its requests or multiplies its acts of love, the prayer is perfect.

Those who thus, without effort, find God, have no need to pursue any other methods, since, by the least movement of the heart, they enter into possession of the Divine light and become all consumed with love.

§ 2. *Mental Prayer: Its Importance.*

238. It is rarely, however, that the soul attains to Divine union by simple vocal prayer. The usual way is that of mental prayer—a difficult way, mountainous, strewn with obstacles, traversing vast deserts, one in which the traveller is subject to the attacks of the treacherous and inveterate enemies who are ever lying in wait for him. But he who sets out upon the road with a firm resolve to persevere will arrive at the goal, despite the difficulties and the dangers of the way. But how will he acquire this energetic resolution and never pause in his onward progress? All that is necessary is to realize the nobility of the enterprise, the beauty and the advantages of the good which he is pursuing. And *this good is the possession of God, by perfect faith and perfect love* (perfect as far as is possible in this world): *to know God better, to enjoy Him in the union of love.* Is not the hope of such a good sufficient to sustain the valiant soul? and is it not because they lose sight of this noble and precious reward that so many stop short, or even turn back?

The way of mental prayer, then, is the way that all who aspire to perfection should follow. The saintly Founders of the religious Orders understood this; the life that they proposed to their disciples was, as they well knew, far above human strength; this is why they obliged them to have recourse to prayer as a means of redoubling their energies, or rather of communicating to them the light and strength that proceed from God. Mental prayer brings us into contact with the Divine light; it makes us realize that God is everything, man nothing—that man is powerless alone, but that, when full of God, he can do all things; and thus, mistrusting self, and trusting God, he will achieve wonders.

All the holy Founders knew, too, that human nature yearns for peace and rest, for pure joys and the outpourings of the heart by love; that it needs the heart of a friend

into which it may pour its griefs. It was for this reason that they taught their disciples to return several times in the day to their Divine Friend, their Heavenly Comforter.

And the worth of a day depends upon the use that the soul makes of these precious moments of mental prayer, for it is here that it finds the nourishment of its interior life, and that the exterior life derives its value and its merit.

239. Those who are animated with the same spirit as the holy Founders, thus understand mental prayer; they, too, are athirst for God; but those who have not this sincere desire, those who have entered into religion, and who continue therein not purely in order to seek Him; or, again, which is more common, those who have come for God's sake, but who are no longer filled with the one thought of pleasing Him, find neither peace nor happiness in prayer. Hence those unstable vocations, that relaxation in formerly fervent Orders. The trials of the religious life appear too heavy to the man who does not seek God purely; the formidable obligations that it imposes, the constant self-sacrifice that it demands, seem an intolerable yoke; and, the Devil aiding, the vocation becomes a burden. For the soul that is thus shaken there is but one remedy—prayer. If it ceases to pray, everything is to be feared for it. But if, overcoming its repugnances, it gives itself up to prayer—if, for instance, it multiplies its heart-felt cries to God: "My God, strengthen my will and grant me Thy holy love"—it will triumph over its temptations, and, in spite of everything, will continue faithful.

But he who seeks God purely in prayer, without wearying or slackening, who, regarding the time devoted to this exercise as sacred, never dispenses himself from it or curtails it, ends by finding unspeakable treasures: *He that believeth in Me . . . out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water* (St. John vii. 38), gushing up into life eternal. Our Lord does not here promise extraordinary favours, visions, and revelations to those who have a sincere and lively faith in Him, but rather the more hidden, less astounding

graces which are neither less efficacious nor less consoling. Their reality, their durable effects, prove that they are Divine ; they are the impetuous rivers of love that urge the soul forward and cause it to precipitate itself, to lose itself in the ocean of the Divinity.

§ 3. *Meditation.*

240. Such is the end to which every soul attains that seeks God perseveringly ; I say perseveringly, for it is only after a long pilgrimage that we arrive at this full possession of God. The first region traversed by the way leading to God is the way of meditation. We must sometimes sojourn here for a long time. It is here that we carefully consider the motives which compel the Christian soul to serve God ; that we study the ways of practising virtue ; that we set ourselves to discover the soul's maladies and their necessary remedies ; that we seek to make ourselves familiar with the life, the teaching, the perfections, the loveliness of Our Divine Saviour. The virtues that He practised seem so beautiful, the advantages arising from them appear so precious, that the desire to obtain them grows, and the fervour of its prayers to God draw down numerous graces upon the soul.

All subjects for meditation are not equally suited to souls practising this prayer. If, especially at first, it is good to dwell occasionally upon the various duties of the Christian life and to traverse their whole cycle, later on, when the soul is sufficiently instructed, it no longer finds the same interest in meditating upon all kinds of truths, some subjects attracting it more and holding the attention more easily. It should follow this attraction, and not be afraid of constantly repeating the same reflections, and especially of reiterating the same protestations, the same desires, the same petitions.

Let it chiefly endeavour to convince itself of the love of which it is the object on the part of God. Let it medi-

tate by preference on the proofs of this love ; the more it is persuaded of this consoling truth, the more rapid will be its progress in prayer and, at the same time, in charity. Devotion to the Sacred Heart also, because it constantly recalls this love of Jesus, greatly favours meditation, rendering it easy and fruitful.

241. In this kind of prayer Nature operates ; the faculties of the soul are very active ; the mind reflects and reasons ; the imagination often gives itself free play ; the person meditating is struck by some pious representation ; sweet emotions follow ; the sensibility is touched, and produces outbursts of ardent affection. And then he who experiences them fancies that he will in this manner attain to perfect love.[1]

But this is a profound error of which he will shortly be disabused. The day comes when this faithful servant who has in no wise relaxed in his generosity, who has not allowed himself to be drawn into dissipation of mind, begins to find great difficulties in his prayer.[2] The sensible emotions die away ; flights of love become rare ; the soul feels like ice ; it seems impossible to evoke any moving thoughts, to follow up any pious reasonings. It is then only that the soul can make any real progress.

§ 4. *The Passage from Meditation to the Prayer of Loving Union, or Contemplation.*

242. God's designs in thus plunging the fervent soul into this state of aridity are easily understood : He wishes

[1] Books intended to facilitate the practice of meditation abound ; we therefore consider it superfluous to insist upon this kind of prayer, as also of affective prayer, which is the second phase of meditation. See *The Degrees of the Spiritual Life*, vol. i., books ii. and iii. (translated by Dom Bede Camm, O.S.B.).

[2] We do not refer here to those who, by their own fault, fall into dryness and distractions ; it is clear that these persons should in the first place remove the cause of these difficulties, by showing themselves more generous in God's service, and especially more recollected and detached.

to communicate to it a more perfect faith, and He therefore begins by depriving the mind of certain acts which envelop the act of faith, but are distinct from it. These acts, which we have just described—the reflections in which the mind takes delight, the beautiful thoughts, the imaginative representations of the Christian mysteries, the sweet sensible emotions that are occasioned by the remembrance of the Divine goodness, the outbursts of love which these holy thoughts evoke—all these are doubtless good, but are rather the prelude or the consequence of the act of faith than the act of faith itself. If we allow an undue development of these mental activities, these emotions of the sensible part, the act of faith will be hampered and impeded. This will be a great loss ; for the act of faith and the act of charity accompanying it are wholly supernatural, while the exercise of the powers of the soul by considerations, by the imagination and the feelings, may be largely mingled with the natural ; the satisfaction that Nature feels in these things is often the cause of our attachment to them. We find here, it is true, a succour for human weakness. Man—so different in this from the Angels—leans on his reflections and emotions ; he is often obliged to make use of them in order to arrive at simpler and higher acts of pure intelligence and pure will ; but when God deprives him of these supports, when He, as it were, paralyses the faculties, it is because He desires to lead His servant to renounce his most secret satisfactions, the free use of the most personal of his possessions—the powers of his own soul ; He desires to annihilate all the human, to the end that man should live no longer except for Him and in Him.

243. This despoliation, this annihilation of the soul's faculties, does not take place at the outset of the spiritual life. The soul would then be too weak to content itself with simple but arid acts of faith and charity ; it would seek elsewhere for that satisfaction which it would be unable to find here, and of which it would refuse to remain

deprived. Nor is it sufficiently advanced in virtue to receive those high graces which this state implies. These graces are poured out into the superior part of the soul, but it is not until after long conflicts and many victories over dissipation and the passions, not until the inferior part has been enfeebled and the superior part strengthened, that the soul becomes capable of receiving these eminent graces.

It would be rash, therefore, for souls that are still weak to wish to place themselves in the state of pure faith; they must wait until God introduces them into it. So long as they can reason on the truths of Christianity, so long as the imagination can conjure up vivid representations of certain mysteries, so long as the heart, overflowing with emotions, feels itself drawn to outpourings of love (which things are a solace to it), it would be unreasonable to try to arrest these faculties; this would be to run counter to the grace that sets them in motion, and does not otherwise communicate itself.

244. It is a critical moment when God calls the soul to enter on this new path, which is the contemplative way. If the higher lights of faith were at once given to it, brightly and abundantly, if the attraction of love that accompanies these lights were strong and powerful, it would not hesitate, but would quit its first manner of prayer without regret. But this is not usually the case. At times, it is true, fervent but still young souls in the spiritual life are thus introduced into a contemplative state that is both ardent and sweet, but this is for a time only. Later on, the trial of aridity, such as we have described it, overtakes them, and it is only after submitting to it, after having undergone painful conflicts, that they again receive, and this in a more perfect and durable fashion, the higher illuminations of faith.

Grace operates progressively, then: its action is at first gentle and almost insensible; but in proportion as the soul by its fidelity removes all obstacles and renders itself more

apt to receive the Divine operations, grace acts with greater ease and strength.

Therefore the first steps in the contemplative way are painful; the faithful soul that can no longer meditate and has no experience of a higher kind of prayer, does not know how to proceed. It has, indeed, a general idea of the Divine Greatness and a dull attraction towards God; but it does not understand that this confused idea of God is given to it by the Holy Spirit, nor that this loving attraction is a direct impulse from the same Spirit. It has a lively and constant desire to love God, and is thus distinguished from the souls that fall into dryness by their own fault; but, finding it difficult to persuade itself that the Divine love can exist without the sensible outpourings which it can no longer achieve, it is astonished, and it suffers.

245. How many then grieve and let themselves fall into despair. The powers of Hell often take advantage of this crisis to multiply their attacks and to make this state seem more sad and incurable than it really is. Woe to those who receive the suggestions of the enemy without resistance! They end by resembling those poor maniacs who are always uneasy about their health, fancying themselves a prey to all sorts of maladies; they remain rooted in the contemplation of their faults, of their impotence; they take their temptations for sins; they see evil where none exists, and think themselves lost when faith in God would infallibly cure them; they are much more to be pitied than physical *malades imaginaires*, because the results of their errors—discouragement and its terrible consequences—are far more fatal.

Without yielding to discouragement many of the faithful, even amongst fervent souls,[1] are too much thrown back

[1] In the *Vie de la Reverende Mère Terèse de Saint Joseph, Carmelite de Tours*, we read that Father Ginhac, S.J., of holy memory, wrote to her thus: "I advise you to think less about yourself, and to keep the eyes of your soul fixed upon Our Lord." Amongst the resolutions taken by this admirable religious during the retreat given by

upon themselves; they look inwards too much, think too much of their miseries. If they thus feed upon anxieties and troubles—and those given to self-scrutiny are very subject to this imperfection—how can they fail to become pusillanimous and wanting in energy? If they do not go so far as to yield to fears that lower and destroy their courage, their acts of love will continue all too few and their progress too slow, until they turn more eagerly to the Divine attributes as nourishment for their souls.

There are others also who persist in the meditations and practices proper to the beginnings of their spiritual life. If no one cuts the bands that confine their wings they will never take flight, they will not receive the high illuminations of perfect faith, nor reach the degree of love to which they were destined to attain.

The wise and courageous soul, if well directed, will accept fully the state of aridity, whatever may be its cause, to which it is reduced; it will submit itself lovingly to the Divine will. Until it has obtained this habitual loving submission it should make its prayers, as far as possible, a series of acts of resignation, exalting and blessing the will of God, and multiplying acts of absolute confidence in the Divine will.

§ 5. *The Prayer of Loving Union, or Contemplation.*

246. If the soul is, as we have just said, faithful to the Divine call, those anxieties which it experienced because it was no longer able to love as it desired, will gradually be succeeded by a profound peace; it is happy to be where God wills and as God wills; it detaches itself from the numberless practices in which it formerly thought to find

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this same Father in 1883, we remark this: "Instead of thinking about myself, I will occupy myself with my Divine King only, to do His will, to give Him proofs of my love, and to promote the interests of His glory" (*Sa Vie*, chap. xii.). She died some years later (1890) in the odour of sanctity.

holiness ; it ceases to rely on itself, on its sensibility, its intelligence, its interior qualities ; it confirms itself in the resolution to serve God faithfully, but it is to Him that it looks for its advancement. Formerly it was contented or the reverse, according as its sentiments were more or less ardent ; to-day its one happiness is to be such as may please God. It is ready for all things ; it accepts darkness equally with light ; it remains when necessary silently waiting, as the canvas awaits the painter, until it pleases the Divine Artist to trace on it the living image of His Son.

To God, then, it must turn constantly, as soon as it has succeeded in dispelling all distractions. It must keep its eyes fixed upon Him with a holy obstinacy, and without reasoning much it must simply recall the infinite goodness, the love, the power, the holiness of God, and this whether it thinks directly of the Divinity or resorts to the Sacred Humanity of Jesus in order to raise itself to the contemplation of infinite greatness.

247. Then grace will work more freely within it. At first it produces a love that is almost insensible but still sweet and profound ; this should reassure the contemplative soul, and prove to it that it is not losing its time. Does not he perform a very meritorious act of love who rejoices to stand before God, who is happy to abide in His presence, to possess Him in his heart, and who adheres faithfully to the Divine will ? In proportion as the soul purifies itself more and more, detaching itself more completely from all creatures and from self, silencing all those vain sounds by which its ears are dulled, so much the more abundantly are the lights accorded to it, producing an ever intenser love. Without reasoning, and better than by reasonings, it receives a vivid impression, a thrilling conception of God's greatness, of His wonderful beauty, His ineffable goodness.

The contemplative soul penetrates thus into the sanctuary of the Divinity ; it acquires the knowledge of the Divine attributes ; it cannot, it is true, understand them, but it

sees, as it could not see before, how ineffable and incomprehensible they are. At the same time it sees how pure it should itself be in order to gaze upon an object so holy and penetrate it the more readily. The comparison that it makes between God and itself inspires it with a new humility, all the more because the same light that reveals the Divine beauties also discloses its own baseness, its imperfections, and its wretchedness. When faithful to this eminent grace, with what new care does it avoid all sin, how it reproaches itself with its slightest weakness, how it seeks to purify itself from the inevitable stains which are a part of all life on earth. Humility and self-contempt on the one side, and on the other admiration and love for God ; these two sentiments go hand in hand.

248. The soul, we have said, should take its delight in God ; if it is faithful in directing all its attention upon Him, the thought of the marvellous life of the three Divine Persons, so intense, so infinitely active, will fill it with rapture. There God enjoys a happiness which He alone can understand, there He obtains all that He can desire, all that is His due. Infinite are His desires, infinite His right to be loved and glorified ; and infinite, too, is His satisfaction, infinite His glory, infinite the love with which He is loved. No earthly thing can offer any obstacle to the boundless happiness that the three Divine Persons enjoy in their mutual harmony of contemplation and love. All combined creation is powerless to trouble it ; no earthly events can affect it. God dwells in an inaccessible brightness, which no mortal eye has ever seen or can see. He abides in an abyss, or, rather, He *is* a fathomless abyss into which we cannot penetrate save by losing ourselves, annihilating ourselves. This thought is of sovereign sweetness to the contemplative soul. The transport with which it is often seized, and by which it goes out and loses itself in God, is all love, ineffable, the cause of glory to God, of profit to the creature. And all the delights of holy contemplation are given to the soul only for the sake of urging

it on to that divine shipwreck in which the soul, despoiling itself of all care and thought for profane things as of some irksome garment, and drowning its every faculty, plunges and engulfs itself in the ocean of the incomprehensible Divinity.

This is a flight of love, a going out of self, a transport full of delights. Contemplation does not always procure this joyous union for the soul. At times it takes another form ; the love is tranquil and calm, the peace profound, but without sensible delectations ; the soul enjoys less ; but let it not be uneasy, its contemplation is no less meritorious.

The contemplative soul may also be conscious of its powerlessness to love this God whom it knows to be so good, at the same time that it realizes all its unworthiness to stand in the Divine Presence, and this double sentiment will cause it the deepest grief. At other times it will find it impossible to concentrate its faculties, and while remaining united to God by the will, the imagination, in spite of itself, continues its flights and the mind its calculations. These are painful conditions, but they are none the less very meritorious, because in these various states the faithful soul never loses this lofty idea of God which the mystic light has given it. It loves Him with an intense love, as is proved by these same burning desires and grief at the soul's inability to express its affection. The great rule for contemplative souls is this : follow the motions of grace, receive the impressions communicated to you—those that purify as well as those that console—and do not thwart the Divine operation by mingling with it a simply human action.

Whatever may be the accessory circumstances of the contemplative state, it follows, from the high idea of God thus obtained, that the soul will never at any price become a rebel, and will only be more strengthened for its conflicts. If this state becomes habitual, and if the soul responds with fidelity to the graces it receives, it makes great progress ; the virtues of faith, hope, and

charity that are exercised so perfectly in contemplation, increase, and the Holy Spirit causes all the other virtues to bud forth from their stems.

249. But the light of contemplation does not limit itself to revealing the greatness and the goodness of God ; it often throws its rays upon the life of Jesus Christ by the study of the Gospel history, and the Passion of the Incarnate God in particular. Meditation has already enlightened the faithful soul, and given it a first glimpse of that love with which Our Lord has loved His children. But how much better is the love of the Heart of Jesus understood when the light of contemplation has shed its brightness upon the infinite majesty of the Word and upon His bitter sufferings ! The traits of the Saviour's life then produce upon the soul a more profound impression, and its love and its generosity are both augmented thereby.

Is it astonishing that the contemplative man loves to pray, that he joyfully welcomes the hour of prayer ? The light of contemplation is the object of his desires, for to understand, even vaguely, all the greatness, the holiness, the goodness of the God of his love, is a real happiness to him. But he aspires still more after the union of love, the fruit of contemplation—to be, as it were, submerged in God by love, to be transformed into Him by the casting away of imperfections and faults, by the annihilation, as far as is possible, of all that is natural and human—this holds out a promise of a joy yet deeper and more ardent. The effects of this obscure contemplation (obscure because the Divine splendours cannot be apprehended here below, save in a general and confused manner) are more precious than those proceeding from visions and other exceptional favours ; it stifles all human preoccupations, it destroys the thought of personal interest, and substitutes for these the single-eyed desire for God's interests. To see this good God loved by its brethren is the contemplative soul's supreme desire. To see Him glorified by those at whose hands it has suffered much, is for this soul, that knows not jealousy,

an immense consolation. With what zeal is it filled, and how constantly does it forget itself, that it may see no other thing save God only! The human *ego* has wellnigh disappeared; on the ruins of self-love it has raised a throne for its God.

This state of contemplation and union has many degrees, more even than those which precede it. Before this union with God becomes the habitual condition of any soul, it must submit to many purifications, and must pass through alternations of bitter trials and intoxicating delights. Both alike are designed to destroy all the human within it, and to give undivided sway to the Divine. The soul must lend itself to the Divine action, accepting the illuminations and impulses that are vouchsafed to it, and consenting gladly when it pleases God to let it continue in its helplessness and the deep conviction of its misery. When God desires thus to obtain from it this renunciation of all activity, of all natural satisfactions, it should thankfully allow itself to be despoiled and, as it were, annihilated, remembering how, in the words of St. John of the Cross, it must pass through the nothing in order to obtain the all.

CHAPTER XXIX

HIDDEN RELATIONS WITH THE UNSEEN WORLD

Et ascendit fumus incensorum de orationibus Sanctorum de manu angeli coram Deo (And the smoke of the incense of the prayers of the Saints ascended up before God from the hand of the Angel).—APOC. viii. 4.

§ 1. *On the Utility of an Habitual Recollection of the Unseen World.*

250. HAVING realized what the prayer of contemplation is, do you not, pious reader, desire the grace to pass on from meditation—*that state of beginners*, as St. John of the Cross calls it—and to be raised to contemplation, which, as St. Francis of Sales, following all the great masters of the spiritual life, tells us, is *the end and goal towards which all these exercises tend.*[1] You are right in desiring this grace, and St. Teresa's words encourage you: "Go forward," says this great Saint, "in the way which leads to contemplation, fight like valiant souls, persevere till death in your holy enterprise. . . . To walk in this road is to gain an immense treasure, and that which seems to us to cost much to Nature is nothing in comparison with the prize which we shall obtain. Those, then, who undertake this journey, desiring never to stop until they reach the end, and slake their thirst at this fountain of living water, must—and this is of great importance—have a fixed

[1] "Meditation tends to contemplation as means to an end" (St. John of the Cross, "Spiritual Maxims," No. 242. "Meditation and all the other intellectual operations in prayer are directed towards contemplation, and are as the ladders by which we should mount up to it" (Rodriguez, *De l'Oraison*, chap. xii.).

determination not to suspend their efforts before arriving at the goal, happen what may, murmur who will " (*Way of Perfection*, chaps. xx.-xxi.). To act otherwise, to apply ourselves to prayer with the intention of not going beyond meditation, is, according to St. Laurence Justinian, as unreasonable as it would be to set out upon a journey meaning to stop half-way, to sow without any desire to reap, to begin to build without intending to finish.[1] How can we do otherwise than desire contemplation when we know that it is the perfect exercise of those virtues of faith, hope, and charity by which the union of the soul with God is effected? Can we fail to ask God for this mystic light, all the excellence of which we have shown, this precious illumination of faith, whereby we attain to a high idea of God's greatness and goodness such as all our own reflection would be powerless to procure?[2] Yes; pray for this precious light, and break down all obstacles that might hinder your receiving it. *This light*, says St John of the Cross, *which transforms the soul and causes it to pass*

[1] See all these passages, and many others of no less interest, in the *Vie d'Union à Dieu*.

[2] St. Francis of Sales, commenting on the passage from Holy Scripture, " Thy breasts are better than wine " (Cant. i. 1), says : " Milk, which is a food provided by the heart and all of love, represents mystical science and theology—that is, the sweet relish which proceeds from the loving complacency taken by the Spirit when it meditates on the perfections of the Divine goodness. But wine signifies ordinary and acquired science, which is squeezed out by force of speculation under the press of divers arguments and discussions. Now, the milk which our souls draw from the breasts of Our Saviour's charity is incomparably better than the wine which we press out from human reasoning ; for this milk flows from Heavenly Love, who prepares it for her children even before they have thought of it " (Dom Benedict Mackey, O.S.B., *The Love of God*, book v., chap. ii.). In one of our previous works, *L'état Mystique*, we find that this is the traditional sense of the words : " Mystical knowledge : it is not an exceptional and almost miraculous knowledge, but that high knowledge of God which the truly faithful souls obtain." Some writers, on the other hand, see in these mystical graces extraordinary and accessory graces, an encouragement rather than a means to perfection ; they also condemn the desire to arrive at the contemplative state. We keep, however, to the doctrine of the Saints and great masters of mysticism.

into the state of perfection, is always ready to shed its brightness into the soul. *Remove all obstacles*, dispel the obscuring mists, and so your soul, made simple and pure, shall be transformed into the purity and simplicity of the Divine Wisdom, which is the Word of God. And as the soul, enamoured of the Divine love, strips itself of the natural element, so the Divine element takes possession of it supernaturally, for God never fails to fill unoccupied hearts.

251. What are these obstacles? We have pointed them out in the preceding chapters: everything that occupies the mind uselessly, all that captivates the will apart from God, hinders the operation of the mystic graces and the transformation of the Christian soul. If, therefore, you desire to obtain the graces of light and love, by which the Divine union is produced, strive against all vain thoughts and natural sentiments, live in recollection and detachment.

We have already spoken of this twofold combat in the preceding chapters, more especially in those dealing with faith and hope; we have shown how the soul must not live in an imaginary world, in the midst of the phantoms which the imagination—that unruly faculty—creates so incessantly, and how we ought to stifle, as far as possible, all those desires, joys, fears, and griefs when they are the products of Nature. But how are we to replace these wanderings of the mind, these movements of the heart? The duties of our state, the tasks which God imposes upon us, are not sufficient to absorb the activity of the soul's powers; nor is it possible to hold them suspended.

All round about you, faithful Christian souls, are beings whom you do not see, but who see you, who observe you, who take an interest in all that concerns you—beings in whom you can find devoted friends and most powerful protectors. Why do you think of them so rarely? Why do you prefer to live in company with your phantoms, your futile calculations, your hypotheses, your exaggerated fears and preoccupations, your chimerical hopes, rather

than with these invisible but very real beings, whose activities mingle ceaselessly with your own, and whose influence upon your life may become very great ?

§ 2. *Our Unseen Foes.*

252. Before speaking of our invisible friends, it will be well to inquire if we think enough of those enemies of our souls who never leave us, and who are the more to be feared because of the darkness that favours their operations. Those who forget the demon's implacable hatred, and are not on their guard against these perfidious foes, do not understand how many of the thoughts that pursue and take possession of us—such, for instance, as those that lead to irritation, vexation, and carping criticisms, or grief, agitation, and depression—are nothing else than infernal suggestions. Nature is doubtless sometimes responsible for thoughts of this kind, but these pass quickly away as soon as the cause is removed ; while we recognize the Devil by his fierce tenacity. He it is who conjures up those dark pictures that so distress and exasperate us, and from which we cannot turn away our eyes. But instead of recognizing the Devil's hand, many persons give themselves up to these thoughts, entertaining the feelings which they produce, and doing themselves much harm. Vigilant and enlightened Christians recognize the tempter's machinations at the outset, and repel all his suggestions with horror.

§ 3. *The Mode of Knowledge of Angels and Disembodied Spirits.*

253. But the thought of the rebel Angels only serves to render us more strong and vigilant in the conflict ; the thought of the faithful Angels and of the elect brings us consolation, strength, and happiness. It is so sweet to be on loving terms with our brethren and friends amongst

the blessed. But first we must set ourselves to know their condition, their feelings, their joys, their powers, the love that they bear us. Their nature is very different from our own ; their faculties are greatly superior. It is necessary to understand—or, at least, to have some idea of —that spiritual knowledge which appertains to the Angels, and which will be our own also on the day of the soul's departure from the body. Dependent as we are upon our organisms here below, we can attain directly to particular objects or individuals only. We begin by knowing them, and it is by comparing them that our minds discover the qualities that they have in common, and then rise to the formation of general ideas. Before forming any general notion of mankind, we must first know such and such a man ; we see white or black objects before acquiring any abstract notion of white or black. Then we place our various ideas side by side in order to form an opinion with regard to them. We set our conception of God alongside of our conception of goodness, and we declare that God is good. Then we join various opinions together, and out of two we conclude a third : God is good ; we should love that which is good ; therefore we should love God.

Thus the human mind proceeds ; it advances step by step, and its field of vision is necessarily much restricted. We are also only able to grasp a small number of objects at once, and very few ideas. Such is human knowledge. An abyss separates it from the purely sensible perception of the animals, for these latter, having no general ideas, are incapable of judgments and reasoning. But how inferior it is to a purely intellectual knowledge. This last, which is proper to spirits, to the Angels, and the souls in Purgatory, embraces in one act a whole group of truths, without needing to pass laboriously from one to another. It sees, for instance, with vivid distinctness, and without any reasoning, that God deserves to be loved, and many other moral or scientific truths as well. It comprehends in one glance an incalculable number of objects ; it plunges deeply into

an abyss of truths. At times God deigns to favour some privileged souls with these intellectual perceptions, and then, in a flash, a whole world lies open to their gaze. St. Alphonsus Rodriguez one day had a vision of Heaven. He "saw and knew all the Blessed as a whole, and each one of them separately, as if he had passed his whole life with them" (*Life*, No. 275). Another day he "discerned each one of the Angels severally, as if his soul had been wholly in each and wholly in all simultaneously" (*ibid.*, No. 6).

Spirits, therefore, possess a much vaster power of perception than ourselves, and one of which nothing on earth can give us any idea. At the moment when we come to quit this world, when round about us the solemn words, "He is dead!" are being uttered, it would be much nearer the truth to say, "He now lives a life of far greater intensity, an intellectual life which will never cease, one which will not know weariness or slumber; his intelligence is increased a hundredfold; a whole world has just been revealed to his eyes, secrets of which he had not dreamed have just been unveiled to him, and there is a greater difference between his illuminations now and those which he formerly possessed than between the knowledge of a child of six and that of a grown man."

§ 4. *Our Friends in Purgatory.*

254. The strength of the Angelic intelligence makes it possible to understand how the souls in Purgatory are able to know what is taking place on this earth and the events of our daily lives. Their guardian Angels, with whom they continue to be intimately related, can give them more information in one instant than we could do with the lengthiest discourses; for the spiritual language, which needs neither words nor phrases, is much clearer, much more complete, and enunciates more truths than our poor human speech can ever accomplish. We are able to

enter into communication with them, therefore, and to hope that our thoughts will be accurately conveyed to them.

Such faults as perhaps distressed us during their mortal life no longer exist : no more self-love, no more self-seeking, no more purely natural preoccupations, no more languor or slackness in the execution of the Divine will. Separation from the world, the loss of all that could seduce them, of all that Nature sought after and loved, and, yet more, God's special action upon their intelligence and their will, have severed all their imperfect attachments, and placed them for ever beyond the reach of sin. They become purified, they free themselves from all the shackles with which their faults had fettered them ; daily some fresh light is shed upon the Divine goodness, the marvels of compassion that the Christian mysteries contain. As they understand better than ourselves the vanity of all earthly things, so they penetrate deeper into the knowledge of God's attributes—His holiness, His justice, His goodness, His tenderness.

And how much greater is their understanding of the Feasts of the Church! With what far greater gratitude and admiration do they celebrate Our Blessed Saviour's birth, His Passion, His Ascension, the mysteries of the life of Mary ! How much better, also, do they understand all the value of the holiness and power of their Heavenly Patrons, of St. Joseph, the Apostles and all those Saints whom they loved formerly to invoke !

And as their minds are illumined, their contrition becomes purer and more ardent, the will more free to exercise its love ; for the ties that held this love captive fall away one by one, until the day comes when it can be exercised according to the plenitude which it had attained at the moment of death ; for by this measure our eternal felicity is decided.

Purgatory is the anteroom of Heaven, in which the soul makes ready for its entry into the abode of all holiness. Not only does it purify itself from the stains by which its

nuptial robe was defiled, but it sees the dispersion of the mists that veiled its eyes ; it ascends from light to light and feels a constant augmentation of its love. And the last hours of its sojourn in Purgatory, those final moments when the soul is almost ripe for Heaven, must surely be days of light and peace rather than of tears and mourning.

If we formed a juster idea of the condition of our friends beyond the tomb, how many things should we not desire to express to them—our condolences for their most terrible, their most piercing pains, our congratulations upon their virtues, upon the brilliancy of the light that shines within them and the transformation of their will ; of our longing to aid them, to hasten the time of their deliverance ; our hopes of being ourselves aided by their prayers. Would not this kind of intercourse with our beloved dead be sweeter and more fruitful than all those imaginary dialogues which we are constantly inventing, and in which we supply both questions and answers, giving ourselves always the leading part ; more fruitful also than the majority of our actual conversations with the living ? Should we not gain much by curtailing or often suppressing the one in order to devote more time to the other ?

§ 5. *The Elect.*

255. When the time of their expiation is over, our beloved dead enter into the abode of eternal happiness. Here a new and far brighter illumination is reserved for them ; the light of glory transfigures their minds—they can see God face to face. During their time of purification they have doubtless learned to know God better than on earth ; but between the knowledge that they thus obtain and the actual contemplation of the Divine Being[1] no comparison is possible. How great, indeed,

[1] Some persons believe that the soul sees God at the moment of death, but this is an error. They are judged in the sense that the state of their conscience, with the pains which they have merited,

must be the intoxication of their delight upon beholding Him who is the Infinite Beauty! Ages will pass, and they will never weary of beholding Him, and the happiness that the vision of God thus causes them will know no diminution for ever.

Holy friends, beloved kindred, ye who have gone before us and who are now in possession of the true life, how we rejoice in your happiness! It is greater, more wonderful, than we can imagine. Oh, how we congratulate you upon your lot! We tremble with joy at the thought that this happiness will be ours also, and that together we shall see the same glorious sights, enjoy the same love, the same joy. You also rejoice in this thought, for your love for us, far from decreasing in Heaven, has wonderfully increased; your hearts, freed from all natural or selfish sentiments, go out towards us with a marvellous affection, and, seeing in our souls the gift of grace that enchants you, you love us with a love which surpasses all the love of the world.

256. Nor is it indirectly or by way of some intermediary that the elect become aware of what is taking place in our lives. In God they read, as in an open book, all that they desire to know. And therefore they know better than ourselves all that we are and all that we do. If we speak to them, they understand our language; they are glad when we tell them of their happiness—most of all glad when we speak to them of God, whom they love with so pure and ardent a devotion. When they were on earth, we spoke to them of those who were near

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are revealed to them. It may be that Our Lord may appear to them in His Sacred Humanity, in order to acquaint them with this sentence, although there is no proof of this. But the vision of God is reserved for Heaven. And in this the essential happiness of the just consists; by it a state of love which will efface all sin and all the suffering due to sin is necessarily produced. Some of our readers may feel surprised at this, but we shall be giving utterance to a certain truth when we add that the devils have never seen God; they could not see Him during their time of probation, and far less could they see Him when they had forfeited all sanctifying grace by their rebellion.

to them : we talked to parents of their children, to friends of their friends ; and they took delight in this conversation. Now that their love has increased, greater still is their satisfaction when we speak to them of those whom they loved, and of that great God who is the object of all their thoughts and affections. If they see us desirous of knowing Him, of loving Him better, if we ask them to help us to serve Him more worthily, we are the cause of real joy to them—of one of those accessory and accidental joys, as theologians call them, which increase their fundamental and essential happiness, but which, small as they are in comparison with this other joy, are nevertheless pure, ardent and delicate. And they hasten to second our desires ; they pray for us, and they obtain for us a very precious increase of grace.

CHAPTER XXX

THE CELESTIAL HIERARCHY

Nimis honorificati sunt amici tui Deus, nimis confortatus est principatus eorum (But to me Thy friends, O God, are made exceedingly honorable : their principality is exceedingly strengthened).—Ps. cxxxviii. 17.

§ 1. *The Angels.*

257. To what extent, then, can our Heavenly friends help us ? Even to the extent of their holiness and their power. There is a wonderful hierarchy in Heaven. God's Angels are divided into nine distinct choirs. In each choir, doubtless, and still more so than is the case among men, great differences are to be found ; in one the intellect is far greater, the will capable of stronger resolves, the power of action more extensive than in another. And the supernatural gifts of grace and merit exhibit similar differences of degree ; there are probably no two Angelic spirits of precisely the same rank, but how much greater is the distance that separates one choir from another, and still more the lowest choirs from the highest.

Now, all these Angels know us and love us, all see in us the children of God like themselves, brethren of Our Lord Jesus Christ ; all are interested in the salvation of our souls ; one single sinner who repents, so Our Lord has told us, is the cause of great joy among them. Do we think as much as we ought of these brothers, so devoted and so powerful ? Do we think about the Angels of that choir which will one day be our own ? Already they regard us as one of themselves. According to the number of the Angelic host, such will be the sum of friends whose love

for us will be sincere and ardent. The higher they are the more admirable are their virtues, their supernatural gifts and their power; and the more also, if we pray to them, are they capable of doing us good.

258. There is one especially who has been charged by God to conduct and protect us. With what assiduous care does our faithful guardian Angel watch over us! How many dangers has he not warded off from us? how many good inspirations do we not owe to him? To enlighten our minds supernaturally in order that they may apprehend the truths of religion, to strengthen our wills directly, so that they may produce more intense acts of faith, this is the work of God who is the sole Author of grace; but our guardian Angel, the elect and the Saints, can render us all the services that we can perform for one another, and far more perfectly; they can communicate good thoughts to us, draw our attention to the motives which should determine our actions, to the advantages which we should derive from such a line of conduct; they can awaken the imagination; insinuate comparisons which will give us light; they can arouse our sensibility. Our guardian Angel has rendered all these services to us; the elect and the Saints render them to us also. We have no such affectionate benefactors upon earth, no such powerful friends; and how much more numerous would their good offices be were we to think of them and hold converse with them more frequently!

§ 2. *The Souls of the Blessed.*

259. The perfect hierarchy which is established amongst the Angels exists also amongst the elect. And this latter is more easy of comprehension to us, although the idea that we can form of it must still be very imperfect; but it can help us to mount up, as though by degrees, to the throne of God, and to give us some slight, but none the less striking, notion of His Infinite Majesty.

In days past we have known souls who have led lives of little virtue, perhaps even of guilt, and who have only been reconciled to God in their last sickness; we have known children called away before they had time to acquire much merit. These last, who, even more certainly than the first, have accomplished their expiation, and to whom we can have recourse, do not occupy a high place in the world of the elect. But if their glory could be made known to us, if we could see the splendour of their happy souls, the ardour of charity with which they are inflamed, and their love for the God who has admitted them to live of His life and to share in His felicity, we should be astonished and enthralled.

But we have been acquainted with souls who were of more persevering fidelity, who have led a truly Christian life on earth. How many virtuous acts have they accomplished? how many merits have they acquired by their spirit of faith and their obedience to the Divine commands? If a cup of cold water given in God's Name causes the divine life to increase within us, how great to-day is their wealth, how perfect are their virtues, and how dear are they in God's sight!

And what of those souls whom we have seen living in true piety, devoted to their duties, faithful to their religious exercises! In spite of the defects which still clung to them, their faith was even more ardent; it had a greater influence upon their whole conduct; more ardent, too, was their love, so that a considerable number amongst them have attained to actual fervour. Of such we will merely say that they are much richer, of far greater beauty, more powerful than those to whom we have referred above.

260. Other souls, again, whom we have known, and whose exemplary lives we have admired, are still higher. All their time belonged to God, their days were full in His sight (*dies pleni invenientur in eis*); for they lived in close union with Him, and all their works were truly

supernatural ; prayer, devotion, and sacrifice divided their lives ; admirable was their self-denial, their zeal for God's glory ; they were assiduous at the Holy Table, and each one of their Communions brought a great increase to their store of spiritual treasure ; they passed whole years in this perfect practice of charity. Oh, were it given to us to see them, could we bear the glorious splendour that surrounds them, and understand the vast horizon that now opens out to their intelligence, their keen insight into the heavenly vision, into the celestial secrets, if we could sound the depth of their love, the scope and immensity of their inward joys, how great would be our wonder ! And could we behold the marks of love with which God overwhelms them, how great, too, would be our confidence in the power of their intercession ! Have we nothing, then, to say to these blessed souls ? We who so readily prolong useless conversations, shall we never hold converse with those who only ask to be our most affectionate friends ? Already they love us with a celestial love, and since with the elect the power of loving is greater according to their degree of glory, so their charity towards us, which is but the consequence and the prolongation of their charity towards God, attains a magnitude which we are powerless to imagine.

§ 3. *The Saints.*

261. Human language is feeble when we speak of heavenly things. We have wellnigh exhausted our expressions of admiration, and we are far from having reached the upper steps of the celestial ladder. High above the perfect souls of whom we have just spoken stand those who have carried virtue to the point of heroism. What strength of soul does not heroism imply ! To practise unhesitatingly and joyfully, on all occasions, difficult virtues which are above ordinary strength, this is heroism ; we say on *all* occasions which present themselves, and these occasions present themselves very often to chosen souls.

We shall see in Heaven how one single day in the life of a saintly soul will have furnished opportunities for many sacrifices, hidden and often terrible conflicts, admirable acts of renunciation. There are some days in particular when all the Devil's malice seems roused against the Saints, and then in one brief hour they win a hundred victories, all highly meritorious. Their trials are severe and constantly recurring, and their acceptance of these ordeals, a hundred times renewed, is always performed with a force of will, a generous readiness of which ordinary Christians have no idea. And what a power of love they thus acquire! A Saint saying, "My God, I love Thee," or "My God and my All," will put into this simple act a thousandfold more of love, it may be, than we could do in sincerely pronouncing the same words.

But what, then, are the Saints in Heaven? What can be their riches, what their beauty, what their power? God communicates to them His strength as He communicates also His splendour, and what is the measure in which they receive His gifts? When it was granted to St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi to see the glory enjoyed by the soul of St. Aloysius, she, to whom so many marvels had been revealed, was enraptured; never before had she believed that there could be such glory in Heaven for the friends of God.

262. Amongst the Saints, too, there are also innumerable degrees. The great Founders of the religious Orders, those to whom God has confided very great missions, the Apostles, St. Paul, St. John, St. Peter, occupy a privileged place. And what can we think of St. Joseph? Oh, marvel and mystery! How blind, therefore, are those who, having in Heaven protectors so powerful and so desirous of doing them good, fail to have recourse to them or do so but rarely and without ardour.

There are some Saints to whom a devotion seems natural to us, so that we invoke them daily. There are others, again, such as our baptismal patrons, those who have led

the same kind of life as ourselves, or who are of the same diocese, the same religious family, upon whom we may have a special claim. It is particularly on their feast-days, when the whole Church is doing them honour and invites us to join our prayers with her own, when the inhabitants of Heaven unite to wish them joy and to honour them, that it is good to invoke their aid. On that day God wills to glorify those from whom He Himself receives so much glory. He lends a more attentive ear to their petitions, He grants still greater favours to those who have confidence in their intercession.

CHAPTER XXXI

MARY

Multæ filiæ congregaverunt divitias, tu supergressa es universas (Many daughters have gathered together riches : thou hast surpassed them all).—PROV. xxxi. 29.

§ 1. *Mary : God's Most Perfect Work, and the Intermediary between God and Ourselves.*

263. AND now, pious souls, now that you begin to catch a glimpse of the glory of the Angels and of the Saints, accumulate in thought all their perfections, their power, their holiness, their splendour ; count up all the glories of these millions of Angels, and of the elect. Those young children, for example, who were taken away at the threshold of life are like faint and flickering torches ; others, generous souls, are like glowing braziers, or even vast conflagrations, while the Saints are immense globes of fire, resembling our earth and the planets ; some again, such as St. Michael, St. Peter, and St. Joseph, being incomparably more luminous still. Unite all these fires, these shining lights, and what a wonderful luminary you will obtain ! But all this radiance, all this glory is nothing in comparison with the radiance, the glory of the Queen of Heaven, who alone surpasses all Paradise, in her beauty, her light, her majesty.

And proceed in like manner with her power, her knowledge of the Divine perfections, her understanding of the greatness and secret things of God. And you will thus form a feeble conception of the scope of Mary's vision which embraces more marvels than that of all other celestial creatures.

And so also with her love, her goodness, and tenderness. An elect soul of ordinary virtue in Heaven is far more inflamed with love for God and for those who were dearest to it on earth than ever before ; fervent souls are more loving still, and what shall we say of the Saints ? But Mary, this good and tender Mother, loved God more while she was upon earth, and loves Him more in Heaven than all other souls together, and she loves us with a deeper love than do all the Angels and the elect.

The elect soul is the drop of water, the perfect soul is the vessel filled to the brim ; the Saint is the overflowing lake, while Mary is the ocean containing more water than all vessels and all lakes combined. But how poor are these comparisons, how unworthy of those to whom they are applied !

264. Mary is God's masterpiece, the most perfect exhibition of His power, His goodness and His wisdom. She is known to Him only, for no mortal creature, no seraph can fathom or comprehend all the perfections of the Mother of God. He has created her as the intermediary between Himself and us. He might, without doubt, have dispensed with this mediatrix, and have caused us to come to Him by another way, but He has preferred to give us this heavenly Mother who so marvellously facilitates our access to Him. According to the vision of the companion of St. Francis, she is the ladder of dazzling whiteness by which we mount up to God. Were the ladder removed we should find it very hard to climb by our own strength, and so without Mary we should find it much more difficult to reach God's throne.

Mary is wholly filled with God—God is everything to her, and there is nothing in her but what is of God and in God ; all created things, then, are seen by her and loved by her in God and for God alone. She loves us in God with that incomparable power of love which nothing can equal ; but, like all the elect, and still better than they, she loves us, not in desiring and procuring for us passing

and vain satisfactions, but in desiring and aiding us to obtain, even at the price of trials and crosses, blessings imperishable and eternal. She loves us because we are the children of God, and because, in our souls, sanctified by grace, she sees a reflection of the Divinity. She loves us because we can give glory to God, and her love for God, whom she knows so perfectly, a love which passes our understanding, impels her earnestly to desire that we should be the cause of abundant glory to her beloved Son and her God.

And what she desires for us she is able to procure, and she obtains it in the measure in which we refrain from putting obstacles in the way of her favours. God the Father has, in effect, invested her with His power, God the Son has filled her with His wisdom, He has associated her in the work of our salvation and in His universal dominion ; the Holy Spirit has filled her with His love, He has united Himself with her, He lives in her, He operates in her and by her.

§ 2. *Our Duties towards Mary.*

265. Let us do nothing, then, without Mary. Let us not content ourselves with some few brief prayers in her honour, a few words addressed to her during some crisis in our lives ; let us go to her constantly. She is ever thinking of us, her eyes are never turned away from us. Let us invoke her aid in all our difficulties, turn to her in all our temptations ; let us begin no work, engage in no spiritual exercise without committing it to Mary's care ; above all, let us never approach Jesus, the Host, without asking her to lead us by the hand, and present us to Him. Mary has ushered in and prepared the Eucharistic God. It was of her that the Word took the Blood of which He formed His own Body ; it is by approaching her, the blessed source of the Divine Blood, that we should prepare ourselves to drink the Blood of Jesus, to nourish ourselves with His Sacred Body.

Let us pray to her for the Church, for the just, and for sinners. The world is full of iniquity, overflowing with impieties, blasphemies and revolts against God. And these iniquities cry aloud for vengeance, and the infinite weight of the Divine holiness and justice is trembling in the balance, ready to fall and destroy the rebellious people. Who is to save us? The Heart of Jesus? Yes; but it is at the petition of that pure and powerful voice that He will loose the floods of His loving mercies which shall cleanse the world; it is in response to that eloquent advocate who has a claim to make her words heard, one who by her merits can exercise a legitimate influence upon the all-powerful Judge, that He will turn His too just wrath away from us.

The Angels grieve to see their God so outraged; they would fain cover with their pure wings the spectacle of such horrors, and conceal them from the thrice holy eyes of the Master of the world; they would fain, at least, disarm His anger with their love were not this task above their strength. But Mary, the Virgin all-pure, all-holy, the powerful Virgin, the Mother of all these sinners, can appease her Divine Son, and obtain once more the world's salvation.

And has she not shown us that we should hope in her? Has not this immaculate Virgin already reawakened faith and rekindled charity? The pilgrims who go to offer their prayers at Lourdes, at La Salette, Pontmain, and at Pellevoisin, return cured. The miracles by which she has restored to health so many sick are the least of her favours, for the good which she has done to their souls is a still greater prodigy.

You pray to Mary, pious readers, and it is superfluous to urge you to do so; but let me nevertheless assure you that your confidence will go on increasing more and more as you come to know her greatness and her goodness better. Study her; often recall to mind the immensity of her merits, the sublimity of her wisdom, the extent of

her powers, the ardour, the depth, the strength, the tenderness of her love, and your prayers will become more fervent and more efficacious.

The immensity of her merits proceeds from the light that she has received and the strength of the love that was given to her from the moment of her conception—a love immeasurably greater from the first outset—and perpetually augmenting—than the capacity of love in the highest seraphim. She was enlightened upon the greatness and the goodness of the Most High above all that we can imagine. All things, however, were not revealed to her. We see in the Gospel that certain of her Son's actions, such as when He was lost, and found again in the Temple, were mysteries to her; for it must needs be that the Mother of so many afflicted souls should know uncertainty and anguish. But with regard to the truths which increase merit and promote the performance of sublime acts of charity, Mary was always enlightened to an unparalleled degree. In this lies the essence of her greatness and her power.

Is it enough, then, that we should address our prayers to Mary? There are souls whose devotion to our dear Mother limits itself to petitions. But this is incomplete. We must further pay her our debt of gratitude, congratulating her upon her greatness, rejoicing in her happiness, and affording her the sweet satisfaction of seeing us imitate her virtues.

It is Mary who, after God, has loaded us most with benefits, since it is she who, after God, has loved us the best and whose love is the most powerful and efficacious. And from how many dangers has she not preserved us! How many inspirations, encouragements and tender reproaches have come to us from her or through her How many graces of light and strength has she not asked and obtained for us? We shall know this in Heaven, but let us not delay until then to tell her all our gratitude.

And to gratitude we should join the tokens of our admiration; we should honour her dignity, give glory to

her extraordinary qualities and greatness. One of the joys of Heaven, and not the least, will be that of venerating Mary, paying her our homage, congratulating her upon her marvellous gifts. But should not this duty be very dear to us even here upon earth ? This is how the Church understands it, and it suffices to repeat from our hearts the words that she puts into our mouths, in order to acquit ourselves worthily of this duty. The prayer of her predilection that the Church addresses to Mary is as beautiful as it is touching. It is a prayer that has come down from Heaven, since it is the repetition of Our Heavenly Father's message to His beloved daughter. It begins by praising her greatness. *Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum, benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus.* It is only after having offered our felicitations upon her privileges, having rejoiced in her dignity, that we ask the Blessed Virgin in words of a touching simplicity to pray for us poor sinners now and at the hour of our death. *Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis, peccatoribus, nunc et in hora mortis nostræ.* Amen.

Let us rejoice, then, in her happiness. It is not possible for us to fathom it, but we can remember that as this happiness is made up of a contemplation of the Divine perfections and of love satisfied, Mary, who penetrates so deeply into the knowledge of God's infinite perfections, knows a joy exceeding the joy of all united creatures. How sweet is this thought to the heart of the Christian who loves his Mother ! And yet we can still add something to her happiness, to Mary's essential joy ; for we can add other accidental joys by our acts of virtue, by the glory that we render to God.

And if Mary loves God with so sublime a love, all that is done for God will cause her a very ardent and exquisite joy—far more ardent, far more exquisite, than the joy of other blessed souls. And if she loves us with a very tender and wholly supernatural love, she rejoices more than our guardian Angel, more than our relations and our

friends, over the good actions which she sees us perform and which must increase our happiness for all eternity. Be the cause, then, of these sweet joys to Mary, O Christian souls ; show her by your generous sacrifices, by the practice of the most difficult virtues, that no efforts are too great which may please her ; and so, more than ever before, will you experience the effects of her most powerful protection.

CHAPTER XXXII

JESUS

In quo sunt omnes thesauri sapientiæ et scientiæ absconditi (In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge).—Col. ii. 3.

§ 1. *His Marvellous Intellectual Power.*

266. We have just learnt how to love Mary better by knowing her better; let us now endeavour to come to a clearer comprehension of the greatness and goodness of her Divine Son, and so will our love for Him increase in like manner.

To understand the soul of Jesus, let us first study His intellect. This is the faculty from which all the others derive their worth, for even the will—that noble faculty which loves, is devout, acquires merits and is the source of all virtue—follows the intellect, because we love only that which we know, and because between knowledge and love a certain relation as to strength and extent must exist.

Jesus was full of truth, *plenum veritatis*, says St. John (St. John i. 14). How He differs in this from the rest of mankind! How many truths escape us altogether, and how small is the sum of those that we possess! "The sum of my knowledge," the thoughtful man should say, "is that I know almost nothing." Such truths as we are acquainted with, have been acquired slowly and painfully, and our memory is unable to retain the greater number of them. Human knowledge, as we have said, is nothing in com-

parison with that of the Angels ; their knowledge is not acquired by study and observation, but is infused directly by God, and, not being connected with any physical organ, it can suffer no failure of memory. God can endow a created intelligence with infinitely more knowledge than the greatest human genius could acquire, were he to study for long ages without ever forgetting anything that he had once mastered. There are Angels who, by their vast intelligence, can in one glance hold and embrace a sum of truths and facts surpassing all that we could learn successively in the course of a long life. But Our Blessed Lord's human intellect is immeasurably superior to that of the most perfect among the Angels. God, who has loved His Son above all created things, has given Him the most magnificent intellect ; it is a deep abyss capable of containing all knowledge both of Angels and of men.

And for Our Lord's mission nothing short of this was required. Every being is endowed by God with the light necessary for the perfect accomplishment of the tasks assigned to it. Jesus, who, in God's designs, is the first-born of all creatures, is their model, their perfect ideal. All proceed from Him and return to Him. He is the King of men and of Angels. All our merits come from Him ; all our graces are granted to us because of Him ; all that we have is His. He must know, therefore, all that concerns us. *Omnia vestra sunt, vos autem Christi.*

§ 2. *The Soul of Jesus : its Celestial Knowledge.*

267. In the soul of Jesus there were three kinds of knowledge : the celestial, or beatific ; the infused, or angelic ; and the acquired, or human, knowledge. The celestial knowledge, by which God is seen face to face, belongs to Him by right. The Son of God, not by adoption, but by nature, it was impossible but that He should see His Father ; and this intuitive vision which the Blessed enjoy, they enjoy through the merits of Christ Jesus. He

is its cause, and He could not be deprived of that which He gives.

From the first moment of the Incarnation Our Lord's blessed soul was in enjoyment of the Divine vision ; in the manger, and even while still in His mother's womb, His soul beheld God face to face, and possessed to an unsurpassable degree that knowledge of the Blessed Trinity which is an inexhaustible source of happiness and love. Not that His human soul knew God as God knows Himself, for this infinite knowledge is possible only to the Divine nature ; but its knowledge was as perfect then as it is perfect now ; it penetrated much more profoundly into the abyss of the Divine perfections than the elect, the Angels, or than Mary, His blessed Mother, could ever do. And always, even when the other portions of His soul were a prey to innumerable and immeasurable sufferings, the superior portion of this same soul was the seat of ineffable and purely celestial phenomena.

In God the soul of Jesus saw, not all possible beings (for as these were without number, they could only be comprehended by an infinite intelligence), but all created beings. The whole natural world, so vast, so beautiful, so perfectly ordered, and the supernatural world—the souls of the just, the Angels, the Saints, present and to come—lay open to Him. His soul saw itself, also exceeding all other things in beauty ; it perceived that by one single act it glorified God more than all other possible creatures could ever glorify Him, even by an eternity of love.

And in God the soul of Jesus saw, without being troubled, His Passion, with all its circumstances and consequences ; saw the good that God is able to draw out of evil ; His goodness, His justice, His mercy, and wisdom in the salvation of men ; the works of sanctification, the Sacraments, the Church—all the benefits of which His merits would be the cause so long as the world endured.

The eye of man has not seen, his ear has not heard,

his heart cannot comprehend, all that the soul of Jesus beheld, all the joy that inundated it, nor the Divine love with which it was on fire.

§ 3. *The Infused Knowledge, the Free and Meritorious Love of the Soul of Jesus.*

268. But this celestial love had no merit ; the love that proceeds from the vision of God is necessary and irresistible ; and it must needs be that Jesus should merit. Therefore, beside this love for His Father and for us, which is born of the beatific knowledge, the soul of Jesus knew another love, one that was both free and meritorious, proceeding from a totally different kind of knowledge. To speak more accurately, He had two kinds of love, each free and meritorious—the angelic love and the human love ; because over and above the beatific vision Jesus possessed two modes of knowledge, that of the Angels and of humanity. The angelic knowledge was His ; for the Eternal Father, who grants it to the Angels and to all human souls as soon as death sets them free from the body, and who has bestowed it a thousand times on his friends while still in the prison of the flesh, could not refuse it to the soul of His beloved Son. Thanks to this knowledge, there was no moment devoid of merit in Our Lord's life, whether in His Mother's womb, in His earliest infancy, or during His hours of slumber ; for nothing can interrupt a life which is independent of any bodily organism.

And what a store of wisdom this infused knowledge contained ! By it the soul of Jesus knew God, and this not by penetrating into the Divine nature, for that is proper to the intuitive vision only, but by the contemplation of His perfections with a marvellous penetration of mind ; and thus Our Lord's soul perceived all nations, all individuals, all the generations to come. A traveller going upon a long journey and encountering an immense number of human beings knows that these form the least

fraction only of the sum of humanity, and he is struck by the vast total of those whom God has created and for whom Christ died.

By infused knowledge Our Lord's human soul thus knew all these creatures, with their sins and their merits—the minutest circumstances of their lives. And so, too, with all the generations which have succeeded and will succeed each other upon this earth ; Our Divine Master knew them all because He was to redeem them all.

It was quite otherwise with the celestial knowledge, that angelic knowledge poured into the Saviour's soul. The beings thus manifested to Him (those which His soul saw as in another picture) no longer produced the same impression upon Him. All that He saw in God by way of intuition was a source of pure joy to Him ; in the Divine perfections, in the Divine justice and holiness, He beheld His Passion itself, and could not but find happiness in seeing these infinite perfections and all their effects. But the objects that He saw in themselves, by means of this infused knowledge, caused Him joy or sadness according to their nature.

269. Therefore, in the soul of Jesus were unspeakable joys, but also incomprehensible sorrows.

In order to comprehend the joys and sorrows of the Heart of Jesus we must understand His love. Love is a great power ; it is a precious gift which God has bestowed upon His noblest creatures. First He gave them understanding, and then, lest they should stand passive in the presence of God, He added love. But these two qualities are not granted in the same measure to all alike. Some minds are narrow, others of extraordinary capacity ; so, too, some hearts are cramped, others full of affection. But God never created a heart as capable of affection as was the Heart of Jesus, even as His knowledge and His love surpass those of all imaginable beings.

But it were better to keep silence than to strive with our poor human speech to convey even the least idea of the

free and meritorious love which the Heart of Jesus bears for His Heavenly Father and for the Holy Spirit, the Substantial Love of the Father and the Son. Better to be silent, too, than to endeavour to express the free and meritorious love of the soul of Jesus for His most holy Mother and for each one of us. Who was ever so desirous of our good, so touched by our ills, so happy in our happiness, as our dear Lord? And the greater the knowledge and the love, the brighter are the joys, the bitterer the sorrows. Mary suffered during her life sorrows which made her the Queen of Martyrs. As her love was greater than that of Angels and men, so was her affliction above all griefs that Angels and men could suffer—vast as the ocean itself. *Magna est velut mare contritio tua* (Lam. xi. 13).

But what shall we say and think of Jesus? By His infused knowledge He knew God better than Mary and all created beings knew Him, and He loved Him with an unsurpassable love; what, then, must He not have suffered when seeing Him unknown, offended by His rebel creatures? And it was not a general view only of the world's iniquities by which the soul of Jesus was afflicted; His infused knowledge made Him aware of the least sins of the human race, and each one of these sins was the cause of fresh sorrow to Him. What must He, then, have suffered at the sight of all our resistance to grace, all our faults, the loss of souls, the eternal damnation of so great a number!

And what joy was His at the sight of our good works, of the heroic virtues of the Saints, of that great multitude that no man can number, saved by His merits. And now in Heaven His sufferings are ended, but His joy continues for ever, and this joy, as in the days of His earthly life, is caused by our generosity, by our virtues, and it is lively in proportion to the ardour of His love for us. Oh, how our beloved Jesus rejoices, He who loves us with such an inexplicable love, how He rejoices when we do what is

right, how He rejoices at the thought that we shall live one day with Him, happy with an unclouded happiness, and that He will then be enabled to give a free rein to His love, and to overwhelm us with His benefits for all eternity!

§ 4. *Our Lord's Human Knowledge.*

270. During His earthly life the soul of Jesus enjoyed, in its superior part, all the privileges of the elect; it possessed in this superior part all the light which is the natural dowry of the Angels; but since it was a human soul, His life, in its inferior part, resembled our own; it gathered instruction by degrees; slowly, and by way of experience, it acquired a knowledge of persons and things; it "advanced in wisdom and age before God and man" (St. Luke xi. 52). We must have a correct idea of this experimental knowledge of the soul of Jesus before we can properly understand the mysteries of His life.

Nothing is more curious to observe than the dawning of an infant's intelligence. At first it is quite devoid of ideas. After a day or two its eyes begin to see, but they see without discerning any definite objects. From the day of its birth the ears, indeed, hear, but all sounds seem confused. The intelligence is, as it were, non-existent; it cannot reason, and is incapable of coming to the least conclusion. Presently it begins to distinguish the pleasant from the unpleasant, and this is perhaps the first idea which, thanks to experience and also to its mother's words and gestures, is formed in the infant's mind. It compares different objects, discovers their common qualities, and without being aware of it, generalizes. It begins to understand that there are good things and bad things, beneficent beings, such as its father and mother, and others that seem to it malevolent, and inspire it with terror. How much time it has needed in order to acquire this rudimentary knowledge! Poor human intelligence, of which some men are so proud, how slow it is to begin to develop; how faint

are its first gleams, how shallow and uncertain its first attempts at reasoning!

But Our Lord made Himself a child of man, and it must needs be, therefore, that He should resemble His brothers, *unde debuit per omnia fratribus similari* (Heb. ii. 17). The better to compassionate our infirmities, He became "one tempted in all things like as we are, but without sin" (Heb. iv. 15). He, the Son of God, could not fail to be marvellously enlightened; but (by a prodigy as touching as it is sublime) in the inferior portion of His soul He was ignorant of many things. He learned to know His Mother, His adopted father, the children of His own age, the people of Nazareth, the places where His early days were passed. He who, had He so willed it, could have opened the lips of the dumb, spoke with the stammering accents of infancy. He who could heal the lame and the paralyzed learned to walk, tottering and falling like other children. Later on He received instruction from Joseph, who taught Him his own trade, becoming first an apprentice and then a workman. During His public life, if He at times revealed glimpses of His supernatural knowledge, He more often, in His outward life at least, made use of His experimental knowledge only; He bore himself as the rest of mankind, and thus we find Him with genuine wonder admiring the faith of the Centurion, the humility of the Canaanitish woman.

§ 5. *The God-Man.*

271. Such was the soul of Jesus, such the marvellous instrument of which the Divine Word made use for the reparation of the offences committed against the Blessed Trinity, and for the salvation of our souls. For this all-holy soul did not belong to Itself alone. For, as our bodies, our members, are our own; as we can say, "I labour with my hands, I read with my eyes," so the Word could say, and can say to us still: "By My Divinity I love you with a love common to the Three Divine Persons, and I love you

with the love of My Humanity. It is I, who in My body and in My human soul have suffered for you, I the Eternal Word who have prayed for you, who have merited for you by that holy soul which I took at the hour of My Incarnation. To-day, in the realms of glory, I delight My faithful ones alike by the grace of My Humanity and by the infinite glory of My Divinity."

How great is the joy of the elect when they behold the soul of Jesus, that ocean of perfection which the highest Angels are unable to fathom, and which is, nevertheless, but a reflection of the infinite perfection of the Divinity! The elect see God in Himself; they are directly illuminated, transfigured by the Blessed Trinity, united to God after an ineffable manner, even as they see God in each of the Blessed, God who is all in all. And at the same time they feel an inexpressible joy in contemplating Our Lord's glorified Humanity; they receive from this Humanity a sweet and vivid illumination; they are filled with a burning love, and this love, satisfied by the intimate union which they then enjoy, causes them unspeakable happiness. This light, this love, this happiness, blend the more harmoniously with the light that they receive upon the Blessed Trinity, with the love that they bear to God, the happiness that they enjoy in Him, as with open face they behold the close and personal union of this glorious Humanity with the Divine Word.

Devout readers, do you know your Lord enough? have you studied all the riches of His Heart? If you knew Him well, could you bear to remain long away from Him without adoring Him, delighting in Him, rejoicing in the possession of such a friend? Aye, a friend; has He not Himself taken this title: *Vos autem dixi amicos* (St. John xv. 14)? "To live without Jesus," says the *Imitation*, "is a Hell, to live with Jesus is a sweet Paradise" (book ii., chap. viii.). Deeply to be pitied are they who do not keep the thought of Jesus always before their minds; they do not know Him as He is; and because they do not know

Him aright, they but imperfectly understand the mysteries of His life and death. Those who have learned to know Him never weary of contemplating Him; the simple remembrance of His holy Infancy, of His public ministry, of His works of mercy, of His Passion, fill them with feelings which they are powerless to express. And so for these souls, earthly cares become less disquieting, earthly ills less grievous, their trials easy to bear; for they live in the hope of one day possessing Him, in the desire of pleasing Him, and in the consolation of loving Him and being loved by Him for evermore.

§ 6. *Conclusion.*

272. How great are the marvels of this supernatural world wherein we live, which penetrates us from all sides, but of which the majority of men think so little. These beings, so beautiful, so intelligent, so powerful, so loving, are invisible to us; to live in close intimacy with them we need a lively and enlightened faith, and faith grows as we exercise it. Let us then think often of our invisible friends; let us hold sweet converse with them; above all, let us make use of them to mount up to God. He who often climbs the steps of this celestial ladder, who delights thus to ascend from marvel to marvel, comes at length to form a less material idea of the invisible world, and above all a less inadequate conception of God and of His infinite greatness. And since this knowledge of God should be the foundation of piety, he is more certain to attain at last to true virtue.

Raise your eyes often, therefore, Christian souls, to this world of the elect, whether at the beginning of your prayers, or in the course of the day; scan with the eye of faith the various circles of these happy denizens of Heaven; mount up, mount up to Mary, then on to Jesus; and Jesus, the Incarnate God, will lead you into the splendours of the Divinity.

APPENDIX

GOD'S ATTRIBUTES

273. Our task is ended; we have pointed out the way that leads to God. And now, with the reader's permission, we will further add an Appendix in which we will sum up all that theology teaches us with regard to Almighty God. There are some thoughts with which every pious soul should be acquainted, with which he should be familiar in order to be able to grasp them as a whole and to take delight in them. We have explained elsewhere[1] that the high illuminations of faith which God vouchsafes to generous souls do not always descend upon them suddenly; it is often necessary to prepare for their reception, and a knowledge of God's attributes may then be of great assistance.

§ 1. *God's Handiwork in the Visible World.*

274. Let us begin this short treatise with a general survey of God's works as they present themselves to our eyes. They form, as it were, another ladder, the ladder of Nature, less brilliant, but more easy of perception to the senses than the celestial ladder of which we have just spoken; one whereby we can also attain to the Divinity, for are not the invisible attributes of God reflected, as St. Paul tells us, in the creature? (*For the invisible things of Him . . . are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made*—Rom. i. 20).

Many writers have delighted in showing how the Divine

[1] *L'État Mystique*, No. 170.

Wisdom is made manifest in the work of the Creation. Huge volumes might be written without exhausting the subject ; but with the object of giving some slight idea of the marvels that this terrestrial globe offers, let us quote a few pages from one of our greatest writers, Fénelon, in his beautiful treatise, *On the Existence of God :*

275. " Who has hung this earthly globe in the heavens ? Who has fixed it in its place so that it shall never be moved ? Who has laid the foundations of the world ? Nothing, so it would seem, could be viler than the earth ; the most wretched of mankind trample it underfoot. But, none the less, to possess it men gladly spend great treasures. If it were harder in substance man would be unable to cultivate it ; were it softer it would be unable to bear him on its bosom ; he would sink down as into a quicksand or a slough. It is from the earth's inexhaustible bosom that our most precious treasures are derived. Out of this formless mass, so coarse and so vile, all other things have their birth, and from it alone all the objects of our desire are, each in its turn, fashioned. Out of the vile clay a myriad creatures, beautiful to the eye, spring forth ; in the course of a single year it transforms itself into branches, buds, leaves, flowers, fruits, and seed for the renewal of its benefits to men. Nothing is exhausted ; the more man draws from its bosom, the more does it yield. After so many centuries, during which everything has come forth from her, this fruitful mother is in no wise exhausted ; she shows no signs of age, she is still full of the same treasures. A thousand generations have fallen asleep upon her breast ; all other things grow old ; she alone continues young for ever ; with the springtime of every succeeding year she renews her youth. All that the earth produces returns again to her bosom, and, decaying, becomes the germ of new fruitfulness. Thus does she recall all her gifts in order that she may distribute them anew. For the decay of the vegetable kingdom and the very excrement of the animals which she herself has nourished, nourish her again, and

make her perpetually fertile. Thus the more she gives, the more she receives again, and never becomes exhausted so long as we are careful to pay her back our debts ; all things come forth from her, all things return to her; nothing is lost. Every seed that falls into her bosom is multiplied a thousandfold. Confide the grain of corn to the earth, and as it decays it germinates, and this fruitful mother pays back with usury many ears for every grain that she received. Dig deep into the earth's bowels, and there you will discover the stone and the marbles for your palaces.

" Who then has endowed the earth with such riches on condition that they should continually reproduce themselves ? See all those precious and useful metals, all the minerals destined for the convenience of mankind !

276. " Admire the plants that spring forth from the soil ; they furnish food for the healthy and medicines for the sick. Their species and their virtues are innumerable ; they adorn the earth ; they give us verdure, sweet-scented flowers, and delicious fruits. Do you see those vast forests which appear to be as old as the world itself ? The trees reach down with their roots into the earth, even as the branches stretch upwards to the sky ; the roots serve as their support against the fury of the gale, and seek, by way of little subterranean pipes, those juices which are designed for the nourishment of the tree. The stem itself is clothed with a hard covering of bark, which shelters the tender wood from the inclemencies of the weather, while the branches distribute through divers channels the sap which the roots have conveyed to the trunk. In summer these boughs protect us with their shade from the sun's rays ; in winter they feed the flames by which our natural heat is maintained. Nor is their wood useful for fuel only ; it forms a soft, though solid and durable, material, capable of being moulded to any shape that the hand of man decrees, whether for great architectural works or for purposes of navigation. The fruit-trees also, with their hanging branches, seem to offer us

their fruits, while trees and plants alike, by their habit of scattering their fruits or their seeds upon the earth, insure the growth of a numerous progeny around them. The most delicate plant, the least herb, contains in a small compass, a single grain, the germ from which are developed the largest plants and trees. The unchanging earth works all these changes in her bosom.

277. "Let us now look at the element which we call water; it is a liquid body, clear and transparent. On one side it flows, it escapes, it flies; on the other it takes the shape of any body by which it is encompassed, having no form of its own. If this water were a little more rarefied it would become a kind of air; all the face of the earth would be dry and sterile, only flying creatures could exist, no swimming animal, no fish could live, and commerce by way of navigation would be impossible. Whose is the cunning hand that knew how to give weight to the water and rarefy the air, making such a clear distinction between these two kinds of fluid bodies?

"If water were slightly more rarefied it would no longer be able to sustain those huge floating palaces which we call ships; the lightest body would immediately sink. Who is it who has taken care to choose such a perfect co-relation of parts, such an exact degree of motion as to make this water so fluid, so insinuating, so mobile, so incapable of any consistency, and yet so strong to bear, and so impetuous to carry onwards the most weighty masses? It is docile; man can guide it as he guides a horse by the least touch on the rein; he distributes it as he pleases; he carries it up the steepest mountains, and by a utilization of its weight causes it to return again to its original level by the force of its own downward flow. But man, who thus exercises his empire over the waters, is borne along by them in return. Water is one of the greatest mobile forces that he can employ to supplement the power lacking to him by reason of the littleness and weakness of his own body.

"But these waters which, notwithstanding their fluidity, form such heavy masses, are none the less able to rise up above our heads and to remain suspended there for long periods of time. Behold those clouds flying above us as though on the wings of the wind. Were they to discharge themselves suddenly in great columns of water, swift as torrents, they would submerge and destroy everything in the vicinity of their fall, while all the rest of the land would be left in a state of aridity. Whose is the hand that holds these aerial reservoirs suspended, and permits them to fall only drop by drop, as though gently sprinkled by the gardener's care?

"Thus water not only quenches the thirst of men but also that of the thirsty land, for the giver of this fluid body has distributed it carefully over the earth like channels in a garden. The waters come down from the high mountains where their reservoirs are placed; they gather themselves together in great streams in the valleys, and the rivers wind their sinuous ways through the plains, that they may irrigate them the better, and pour themselves finally into the sea.

"The waters distributed thus with such marvellous skill circulate throughout the earth, as the blood circulates in the human body.

278. "Having considered the waters, let us now set ourselves to examine other still more extensive bodies. Behold the element that we term air. It is a body of such purity, subtilty, and transparency that the light of the most distant stars penetrates it without difficulty, in order to come and afford light to our eyes. A little less subtilty in this fluid body would have deprived us of the day, or would have left us at best a dim and confused light, as when the air is full of a thick fog. We live in the abysses of the air as fishes live in the abysses of the water. And as water, if it increased in subtilty, would become a species of air which would cause all fish to die, so, on the other hand, the air would become incapable

of respiration by our lungs if its density were to be augmented and its humidity increased; we should drown in the waves of this intensified air as an animal drowns in the sea. Who is it who has prepared the air that we breathe with such marvellous precision? Were it of greater density it would suffocate us; were it more subtile it would lack that quality by which our life is sustained; we should everywhere experience the sensation which is now felt only at the summit of the highest mountains, where the rarity of the air is such that it does not afford the necessary humidity or nourishment for our lungs.

"But what is the invisible power which so suddenly excites and calms the ragings of this great fluid body? The tempests of the sea are but the consequences of other disturbances. From what treasure-house issue the winds which purify the air, which temper the burning heats of summer, the inclemency of winter, and change in an instant the whole face of Heaven? The clouds fly from one end of the horizon to the other on the wings of the winds. We know, too, that certain winds prevail in certain seas at fixed seasons. They continue for a definite period of time, and are then succeeded by others, as though for the express purpose of regulating and assisting navigation. Provided that men are as patient and as punctual as the winds, their longest voyages will be accomplished without difficulty.

279. "Behold the fire which burns in the stars and sheds its light abroad! Behold that flame which certain mountains vomit forth, feeding itself upon sulphur in the bowels of the earth! And man has been able to bend this same fire to his uses, softening the hardest metals, now feeding it with wood, and in the most icy regions keeping alive flames that take the place of the sun's departed rays. Fire lends its strength to man's weakness; houses and rocks are destroyed by its might. And if we desire to confine it to more moderate uses, it warms us, and cooks the food by which we are nourished. The ancients. in their

admiration for fire, believed it to be a celestial treasure stolen by man from the gods.

280. "But let us now raise our eyes to the heavens. What power has raised this vast and magnificent vault above our heads? What an astonishing variety of admirable objects! Now we behold a dark azure expanse, wherein burn innumerable fires; now it is a sky of softest tones and colours which painting is powerless to imitate; now we see clouds of every shape and the most vivid hues, changing every moment by the most exquisite undulations of light.

281. "And what are we to learn from the regular succession of days and nights? For many centuries the sun has never failed to serve man, who cannot dispense with its aid. For how many thousand years, at the given moment and at the appointed place, has the dawn unfailingly announced the coming day? The sun, says Holy Scripture, knows the place of its going down; and thus it alternately lights up the two sides of the world, and visits those to whom its rays are due. The day is the time of social intercourse, of labour; the night, as it wraps the world in its shadows, brings the cessation of toil, the softening of sorrow; it suspends all things, calms all things; it sheds silence and sleep, and by the relaxation of the body the spirit is renewed. Soon the day will come again to call man to his work, and to reanimate the face of Nature.

"But beyond this constant round of days and nights the sun marks for us another division of time, travelling for six months in the direction of one pole, and at the end of this period retracing its steps with no less diligence in order to visit the other. By this wonderful order one sun suffices for the whole earth. If it were larger and at the same distance, the earth would be burnt and destroyed; it would crumble into powder. If at the same distance it were smaller, the earth would be frozen and uninhabitable. If, being the same size, it were nearer to us, we should be burnt up; if farther, we could no longer

exist on this terrestrial globe from lack of heat. By what compass, embracing the heavens and the earth, have these exact measurements been taken? And the benefit which the earth receives from the sun's temporary withdrawal is no less than that of its approach. Its beneficent rays fertilize all that they fall upon. Its changes make the seasons, whose variety is so pleasant to us. Spring silences the icy winds, brings forth the flowers and the first promise of fruits. Summer gives the rich harvests; autumn, with its wealth of fruits, fulfils the promise of spring; while winter, which is a kind of natural night wherein man relaxes his energies, stores up the earth's treasures in order that the spring may scatter them again with all the added beauty of novelty; and thus it is that Nature, with her various adornments, affords so many beautiful and novel spectacles to man that he can never become weary of what he possesses."

282. And the great writer continues his descriptions; he speaks of the stars of the firmament, he studies the animals and their various species, the birds of the air, the fishes of the sea, and although he hardly does more than touch upon such a vast subject, he none the less finds innumerable proofs of the Creator's wisdom. And what can we say of man; of his body, with all those wonderfully disposed organs, so perfectly designed for the fulfilment of their delicate functions?

But in spite of the brilliancy of Fénelon's picture, it could not fail to be exceedingly incomplete, for how many other marvels, how many of Nature's energies, were not even dreamed of in his day. The wonderful discoveries of the last two centuries, and others which are added to them daily, have afforded a still more striking manifestation of the Creator's power and wisdom in this lower world of matter.

Such, then, is the Divine handiwork as it presents itself to our eyes. And for the accomplishment by Almighty God of such marvels, no study, no research, no calculation,

as we shall shortly show, was required. By one single glance, dating back from all eternity, the whole universe was determined ; by one act of will, an act which was likewise eternal, God decreed that at an hour ordained by Him all creatures should come into existence, that each of these countless beings should accomplish its mission, and that all the events of the world should thus unfold themselves in a perfect order until the end of time.

§ 2. *God's Immensity, His Knowledge and Power.*

283. What are the relations existing between God and the beings that He has created ? Such is the question that we are about to consider.

First, then, He contains them all in His immensity. God is everywhere. "If I ascend into Heaven," says holy David, "Thou art there ; if I descend into Hell, Thou art there also. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea : even there also shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me" (Ps. cxxxviii. 8-10). I shall not have passed out beyond Thee. And yet how vast are the realms of space ! thought loses itself in the effort to realize them. The distance between the earth and the sun is alone sufficient to stagger us ; in order to give some idea of it, scientific men have calculated the time that would be required to traverse it. Travelling a hundred leagues a day, a thousand years would be occupied in the transit. A ball, projected through space with the velocity with which it first issued from the cannon's mouth, would be more than ten years on the way. And this is a mere nothing when we compare this distance with that which separates us from such stars as are visible to us, the nearest of these being a hundred thousand times, and many others millions of times, farther away. This same cannon-ball would take millions of years reaching them, a thousand times as long as from the creation of the first man until now. And if the ball could be projected

from one star to another, it would take millions of years for each journey, so far removed one from the other are even those stars which seem to us to be in closest proximity. If, therefore, we were to set ourselves to visit all the stars of Heaven, and could travel with the speed of a cannon-ball, thousands of millions of years would not be enough to enable us to carry out our intention.

When we have thus tried to gauge this unthinkable immensity, we need not fancy that we have arrived at any real idea of the immensity of God; we have not begun to get near to it, and a thousand worlds as large as our own would be in God's sight, as a grain of sand compared with the illimitable vastness of the heavens. And although for all eternity God should incessantly continue to create fresh worlds, they could not contain or limit Him, for there would ever be some place where the world would end, while God could know no limit. It is like an infinite circle; mount up on high or descend into the lowest abyss, go to the right or fly to the left, travel onwards for thousands of millions of centuries with the swiftness of light or of electricity,[1] and you will be no nearer to the circumference; you will continue for ever at the central point, "for the centre is everywhere, and the circumference nowhere."

But the most admirable thing of all is that God does not fill the world after the manner of corporal beings, one part of which occupies a particular point of space, and another part occupies another. No, God is a spirit, and therefore He fills all things without any division of Himself. He is everywhere, but *entire everywhere*, entire in every part as He is entire in the whole.

284. God, then, is everywhere, and since He is everywhere nothing escapes Him, His knowledge is boundless.

We have spoken of the wonderful knowledge with which the soul of Jesus was endowed. All men of all ages were incessantly present to Him; He knew their names, their works, their occupations, their talents, their characters,

[1] About 210,000 miles a second.

their affections, their every feeling, all their desires, their most secret thoughts.

But this universal and perfect knowledge of the whole human race which the human soul of Jesus possessed, and which seems so astonishing to us, is but the least part of the Divine knowledge.

It is thus that God knows all created things ; the number of drops in the ocean, the separate history of each of these drops of water from the time of its creation ; He knows, in Our Lord's words, the number of the hairs of our heads, not one of which falls to the ground without His permission, the sum of the grains of sand, of the blades of grass, of the leaves on the trees. Let the imagination appraise, as far as it can, the vastness of this universe ; let it calculate the almost infinite multitude of creatures of all sorts of which it is composed, the various animals, the fishes that swim in the seas and rivers, the insects, the microbes which each blade of grass, each drop of water contains by hundreds of thousands, the myriad species of plants, the minerals, the stones embedded in the earth to its very centre—all these creatures, the very number of which appals us, God knows them all, and knows each one perfectly. And in the same way He knows the numberless creatures of the other planets, the majority of which are larger than our own globe.

And while God thus sees all those beings which are actually in existence, He sees equally all those which are now no more : all the facts which have ever been ; all the feelings, all the thoughts which have ever disturbed the minds and hearts of all rational creatures ; all the successive changes which inanimate creatures have undergone ; in a word, all the past lies open to His eyes—or, rather, for Him there is no past : all is present.

Neither is there any future with Him ; all those events which shall succeed each other to the end of time are equally known to Him in all their least and most insignificant details. The farthest centuries contain no secrets

for Him; not that He imagines in advance the things that may occur, but He sees all future things as already and actually present before Him.

285. These thoughts help us to catch a glimpse of the boundless immensity of God's intelligence; and yet, however numberless may be events, past, present, and future, they are nothing in comparison with the incomparably larger number of possible events which are equally known to Him. Each event that takes place in the world might be differently manifested; it might vary in each one of its thousand circumstances. The least thing is susceptible of an infinity of changes, and all the facts depending upon it might therefore be modified. And God knows all the changes which might thus have taken place, all the facts which might have been in the past, and all those that might have been about to happen in the future. He knows the sum of all the myriad worlds which He might have created. "He knows all the actions, the words, the thoughts, which might proceed from all the beings with whom He might people these worlds—all the different kinds of creatures which He might call into existence there, the virtues, the properties, the dispositions which each one might possess."[1]

286. Such is the immeasurable scope of God's knowledge, the innumerable multitude of persons, of things, of facts, which His mind contains. And God has no need of research, of study. He is as little absorbed in the sight and the actual and very distinct knowledge of this infinity of objects as though He were not thinking of them at all. And yet He sees each of these objects as perfectly as if it were the sole object of His vision. His knowledge is eternal and invariable; from all eternity the eye of God has seen everything that He sees to-day, and the centuries to come can bring Him no increase of knowledge.

287. But how does God know so many existing or possible beings? It is in Himself, in His Divine essence,

[1] Father D'Argentan, Conferences, Lent, 1874.

that He sees and contemplates them. He sees them in their cause; He sees them with their specific nature and all their individual characteristics.

He sees and He ceaselessly contemplates all the infinity of His wondrous perfections, and He sees all the ways in which these perfections are communicable. He sees the whole extent of His power, and, seeing this, He sees also all that He could create, preserve, or destroy; He sees all His Divine wisdom, the wisdom by which all things are sustained, directed, and governed. Nothing can happen that He has not foreseen, willed, or permitted. In beholding His infinite wisdom, God, then, sees all present, past, future, or possible worldly events, and all imaginable worlds. He sees all the riches of His infinite goodness, all the good that He will do or could do to His creatures. He sees all the equity of His Divine justice, all the sentences that He will pronounce upon the elect and the reprobate, the rewards and punishments that they will receive according to their deserts.

But all these attributes that we distinguish in God—power, wisdom, goodness, and justice—are not, as we shall show, really distinct; they are but one and the same perfection—or, rather, to speak more accurately, they *are* God, the essentially simple Being; and as it is by an act of self-contemplation that God sees all created things, it is by a simple, unique regard, never multiplied, never repeated, that God sees everything, embraces everything.

288. God's knowledge is universal, but it is not a sterile knowledge. God is not an idle spectator; if nothing escapes His eye, so nothing escapes His action; His power is exercised everywhere simultaneously.

This power is a just object of our admiration. It shone forth in the beginning by the creation of so many diverse creatures. Whence are these creatures? Whence did God produce them? What did He make use of for their construction? He brought them out of nothingness; He made them of nothing. Though all the inhabitants of the

world should combine their forces, though the cleverest workmen on this earth should exercise all their industry, the greatest savants all their science, they could not, from nothing, create so much as a grain of sand. It is an undisputed axiom of human science that out of nothing we can make nothing—*Ex nihilo nihil fit.* The angelic spirits would be as powerless; from nothing, the whole angelic host combined could not produce a grain of dust, a single atom. But God has created all things out of nothingness: the world of matter, the celestial bodies, all these objects, so different in their nature, the world of spirits, no less rich and varied. And all this without effort—*Ipse dixit et facta sunt.* He spoke, and they were created; He willed, and the beings which were not, stood before Him, and said: "We are here" (*Adsumus*).

289. God has created all things; He preserves all things. Even after their creation all those beings were powerless to maintain this borrowed life which they had received from their Creator.

They are not like the picture which continues to exist after the painter has laid down his brush; they rather resemble the notes which cease to vibrate as soon as the instrument is at rest; they are like the ray of light which vanishes as soon as the lamp is extinguished. Thus every created thing would be suddenly annihilated if the Creator were for one instant to withdraw His sustaining Hand. We have as great a need of God during every moment of our lives as we had when He first called us into being. Our preservation is nothing less than a continued creation, and the sustaining of such an innumerable multitude of creatures, preventing them from falling back into their nothingness, requires a power equal to that which called them out of it at the beginning.

290. And if the creature is unable to subsist, far less can it act, apart from God. The same God by whom its life is preserved communicates to it action and movement. All the various creatures that people the world are subject

to the Divine action. God is concerned for each one of them; He lends His succour to those that He has dowered with intelligence and liberty of action. Without the Divine assistance they would remain inert, and liberty would be a useless gift to them. He directs the others in their instinctive actions, their vital operations, their purely mechanical movements; for, in spite of having received from Him an independent activity, they could not make use of it did not God, at the required moment, give them the necessary means.

The mind loses itself in the attempt to number all these movements and acts of created things. Number the inhabitants of the earth, the elect of Heaven, the reprobate in Hell, the creatures upon whom free-will has not been bestowed. All these various beings act in different and often in quite opposite ways. But not an action, not a movement takes place without God's assistance. God is all-sufficient; without effort, without labour, He works everywhere; He acts with all who act: *Omnia opera nostra operatus es nobis* (All our works, O Lord, Thou hast wrought in us—Isa. xxvi. 12).

§ 3. *God's Goodness: His Holiness.*

291. God is essentially free: all that He wills, He wills freely; all that He performs, He performs in all liberty. *Omnia operatur secundum consilium voluntatis suæ* (Dividing to everyone according as He will—1 Cor. xii. 11). His will is eternal because His will is indistinguishable from His Being, indistinguishable from Himself; He is eternally free; from all eternity God wills that which He wills, but He wills it freely.

And what is it that He wills? Towards what does His will incline? The Divine will tends to good; it can will and love only such things as are good. We do not refer here to that Absolute Good which is God, and which is necessarily loved and willed by Him; we speak of relative

good, of created good, and we say : " God wills that which is good, and since apart from Him good does not exist, He brings it forth. It is in this that His love consists. *Deus caritas est*, and the property of love is to will and to do good."

Let us recall once more the principles so well expressed by the theologians : *Bonum est diffusivum sui* (The good loves to shed itself abroad). God, the Supreme Good, the essentially good Being, loves to communicate His goodness, to shed abroad His perfections. " Because," says Dionysius, the great master of mysticism,[1] " He is good substantially and by nature, He sheds His goodness upon all creatures." It is to distribute His gifts, to communicate a share of His infinite goodness, that God has called such innumerable creatures into existence, each one of which owes Him a thousand benefits.

292. But leaving other creatures, let us see what He has done for us—what gifts we have received of His liberality. To begin with, He has given us existence, preferring us to a host of other beings whom He might have created in our place ; and by this gift alone God has made Himself the greatest of benefactors. He has given us the life which distinguishes us from inanimate things ; senses by which we can communicate with other creatures—most precious benefit indeed, the importance of which we appreciate the better when we see the misfortune of those who are deprived of them ! He has endowed us with memory, whereby we preserve the past ; intelligence, that magnificent gift which raises us so immeasurably above other creatures and gives us a first resemblance to Himself, and a will by which to love and seek the good. In this body, the soul's earthly tabernacle, He has given us a wonderful instrument, dowered with organs, the perfection of which astonishes us more and more as we get to understand them better.

293. Again, we owe it to the Divine goodness that we

[1] *De divinis nominibus*, chap. iv., No. 1.

have not been cast upon this earth without support, and abandoned to our own resources. It is He who, in our parents, has provided us with an indispensable stay and succour ; He has willed that they should occupy for us the place of His first representatives. He communicates to them a portion of His authority, implants in their hearts a spark of His love for us, so that they may be led to watch over us with solicitude, to supply all our needs, and to surround us with care and devotion. Thus God is the first author of all those good things that a child receives at the hands of its parents ; it is to God that its first act of thanksgiving is due. It is to God also that we owe all the benefits derived from our equals. He created them and set them on our path. He gives them the means and the will to be useful to us. He it is who has made man a social creature, who impels us, either by motives of self-interest or of kindness, to assist one another.

294. And if we direct our gaze towards Nature, God's benefits everywhere meet the eye. The plants that furnish our food and clothing, the air that we breathe, the water so necessary to the various usages of life, the fire that warms us, the stars that give us light, the earth upon which we live—all that is about us is a gift from God. God has made all things for us ; we are His privileged creatures. " What is man," cries the inspired prophet, " that Thou art mindful of him ? or the son of man that Thou visitest him ? Thou hast made him a little less than the Angels ; Thou hast crowned him with glory and honour, and hast set him over the works of Thy hands. Thou hast subjected all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen : moreover, the beasts also of the fields, the birds of the air, and the fishes of the sea that pass through the paths of the sea " (Ps. viii. 5-9).

295. It would certainly be no light task to enumerate all the benefits that we receive from God in the natural order ; but how comprehend those other most precious benefits that He has granted to us in the supernatural

order? He offers us His grace, a gift so high that no creature has ever been able to attain to it, or even to imagine it. By His grace God makes us participate in His own nature; by grace he who is but a servant and a subject receives a new nature, by which he becomes a true child of God, and in a manner deified. It is, as it were, an emanation of the Divinity, communicating a Divine beauty and strength to the soul. And God offers this priceless blessing to all. He asks nothing better than to diffuse it abundantly upon each one of His servants; and at the first sign, the first petition of His faithful ones, with each good work that they accomplish, He augments in them this precious treasure. And what shall we say of the other benefits of the supernatural order—all those aids which He grants us with such liberality, those holy thoughts, pious aspirations, ardent desires after goodness; the Sacraments which contain the treasure of His Precious Blood, those vast conduits into which He pours an abundant measure of His graces; of the supernatural qualities, virtues, and gifts which He is pleased to communicate? He loves to scatter His bounties abroad, to pour them out in profusion. He gives; He gives ceaselessly; He gives without exhausting His treasures. He is like the sun, shedding its light round about it and never diminishing in splendour, radiating its heat without ever becoming cold. *Nec est qui se abscondat a calore ejus.* His beneficent action is exercised in all places, and no one is a stranger to His gifts. As a theologian has said:[1] "He gives to all, and this is great; He gives to the unworthy, and this is greater; He gives to the ungrateful, and this is greater still; He gives even to those who repulse Him, and this is the crown of greatness; then, having nothing more to give, He gives Himself, and this is Divine." Yes. HE GIVES HIMSELF. Oh, ineffable words, which suffice to prove that the Divine goodness is infinite! Heaven is God Himself communicated to the soul; Heaven is the

[1] Contenson.

soul enriched with the Divinity, penetrated, transformed by Him, taking part in the inner life, the felicity even, of God. All other gifts lead up to the one gift. It is for this that God has created us; IT IS THIS THAT HE HAS CONSTANTLY HAD IN MIND IN THE CONDUCT OF HIS PROVIDENCE CONCERNING US: to make us to eat and drink at His table in His kingdom (St. Luke xxii. 30), to make us happy in His happiness for evermore. Poor little creature, how unworthy art thou of such favour! God, with all His treasures, could give nothing more—*cum esset ditissimus, plus dare non potuit*—and this gift of Himself is an eternal gift!

296. But if God thus lavishes His gifts, His liberality is not blind; He pours out with profusion, but with an infinite discernment and wisdom, guided always by His own infinite holiness. And what is holiness? It is the hatred of evil and the love of good; and by good we mean moral good, which is perfect order. And as in God the hatred of evil is infinite, infinite also is His love of good.

It is because He desires this moral good that He has created a race of free beings, capable of producing good and virtuous acts. The inferior creatures unconsciously play the part assigned them by their Creator. The ox labouring at the plough, the dog watching over its master, the hen defending her brood, follow God's established order; but because they obey their instinct blindly, they cannot acquire merit: no holiness is possible for them. But God has willed something more than this. He has willed beings formed in His image and likeness, a free race—free to will and to love the good, and capable, therefore, of becoming holy like Himself.

297. God does no violence to our liberty nor constrains us forcibly to good, but He neglects nothing that might lead us to practise it. First, He takes care that we should be acquainted with the good. From the earliest ages of humanity He has revealed His law to men; He has made known to them the chief details of the principles of morality,

so that no one should mistake evil for good or good for evil. He has engraved this moral law in our hearts ; He has willed that we should always be admonished of our duties and obligations by the voice of conscience ; and this voice is ever there to recall us if we are going astray, or to urge us on to good when we hesitate.

But all this, alas ! has not been sufficient, and men have made an evil use of their liberty—that best gift of God. They have infringed the Divine law which the Thrice-Holy God had been so careful to make known to them. And these backslidings only served to make the Creator's holiness shine out with greater splendour. The world had become a stranger to virtue ; it had fallen into iniquity ; and so God sent His Son to save the world from sin, and to give it the example of holiness of which it stood so much in need.

298. Such is the twofold end of the Incarnation, and nothing can better make us understand the infinite holiness of God, His hatred of sin and evil and His love of virtue. God's hatred of sin was infinite, and that He might destroy it, He gave His Son to the world for a Sacrifice. The Son of God had a boundless hatred for sin, and to atone for it He abased Himself and took upon Him the form of a servant. The sole aim of His earthly life was the destruction of sin and the bringing in of the reign of virtue. Let us recall, too, the life and sufferings of the Incarnate God, the privations to which He willed to submit, His laborious ministry, His evangelizing journeys, His labours, His wonderful teachings, His exhortations—in a word, all the actions of His life, and, above all, the awful, the unspeakable, sufferings of His Passion.

299. What more could He have done to expiate sin, to banish it for ever from the world ? And yet the holiness of God has willed to do still more. He desired the continuance of this work of salvation and sanctification which He Himself had begun. To this end He has founded His Church and will preserve her for all time, baffling

all the efforts of Hell. Through her He will not cease to preach a turning away from evil, to inspire a horror of sin, to urge men to the practice of virtue. Yes, it is to the Thrice-Holy God that we must attribute all those thousand means that the Church employs for the preservation and sanctification of souls—her sweet and salutary worship, her instructions, her missions, the care that she bestows upon education, her labours of every kind. It is God who is the source and foundation of all her works. He it is who in all parts of the globe, simultaneously, inspires the zeal and activity of her children ; it is to Him alone that the glory is due.

And do not all those supernatural blessings by which we have proved His goodness demonstrate His holiness also ? Is it not, for instance, to supply His feeble children with the easiest and most efficacious means of sanctification that He has instituted the Sacraments, and above all, that adorable Sacrament in which He makes Himself their Food ?

And the perfection that we call the justice of God is likewise His holiness. The Divine justice punishes evil and recompenses good ; and this because it is His law that evil should be punished and good rewarded, and also because chastisement turns us from evil and encourages us to good.

God recompenses virtue with admirable justice, for each act is appraised at its exact value. The least and apparently most insignificant work, if performed supernaturally, is accepted by Him, and obtains us an increase of grace and glory.

§ 4. *God's Justice, Patience, and Mercy towards Sinners.*

300. If mankind were faithful, God's justice would only be exercised in rewarding us according to our works. But, alas ! what an evil use do we not make of our liberty !

God has given us everything to facilitate the practice of virtue. He helps us, inspires us, encourages us ceaselessly, and yet the earth is for ever defiled by sin. How will the infinitely holy God act in the presence of this hideous disorder of sin? It is here that the occasion arises for God's justice, His patience, and His compassion.

Avenging justice unfailingly exacts reparation for all the disorder caused by sin. Mortal sin is an offence of infinite gravity, since by it an infinite Majesty is outraged. Therefore, if it is not effaced by the contrary act, which is a detestation of the fault, if the creature that has turned away from God does not return to Him again, the Divine justice inflicts a chastisement which is eternal. And the elect applaud this irrevocable sentence, while even the damned themselves are unable to deny that they have deserved their fate.

If, when sin has been destroyed by contrition, the repentance, as nearly always happens, is not lively and powerful enough to counterbalance all the offence against God's Majesty, His justice will still exact an expiation. This Divine justice is in perpetual operation, and we may thus regard all earthly ills as its manifestation. Those who are smitten have usually deserved some chastisement, for the souls that owe no debt to God are very rare. Even when the just are afflicted with trials, it is none the less an act of God's justice; for these just men, like their Divine model, suffer for the guilty, and thus, in part at least, the debt of sin is paid. But all the pains of earth are not sufficient, and the work of expiation is still to be completed by the cleansing fires of Purgatory. And thus only can God's inflexible justice be satisfied.

301. When we understand the gravity of sin and consider how it reigns almost as the master of the world, far from marvelling at the strokes of the Divine justice, we can only wonder why the chastisements are not more terrible. How great is the malice of sin! How revolting the insolence of this miserable nonentity setting itself against

God! How repugnant the perversity of this puny egoist exhibiting the most monstrous ingratitude towards the greatest of benefactors!

Those who sin, to quote St. Paul's words, "crucify again to themselves the Son of God" (Heb. vi. 6). For it was mortal sin that caused Our Lord's death. It is for all sins, and for each sin in particular, that Jesus Christ endured the torments of His Passion. To commit a single mortal sin is to co-operate in deicide, to repeat the iniquity of Pilate, of Judas, of the executioners, it is to take part in and assume the responsibility for all the torments inflicted upon Him during His dolorous Passion.

Such is the spectacle by which God is offended daily, this God of goodness and mercy, this God who should be served with joy and glorified by all creatures! His infinite perfections, His innumerable benefits, ought to draw all hearts to Him and subjugate all wills; and yet none is ever offended as God is offended. Those who offend Him are legion. Is there one hour—or, rather, is there a single moment—in which God is not outraged? It is only God who is thus offended. God beholds all the injuries done to Him; He hears all the blasphemies uttered against Him; He sees all His laws violated, His will despised, His benefits repaid with ingratitude. Sin is hideous to Him, and sin is everywhere before His eyes.

302. It is not the eternal punishment reserved for sinners that should astonish us. The marvel is that God should bear with us so patiently, and defer the chastisements which He might inflict to-day. Look at that miserable creature in revolt against Him! He could put a sudden stop to its insolence; He could smite it now with His rod, and avenge Himself for the outrages thus offered to Him. But no; He withholds His hand; He allows His enemies and blasphemers to live on in peace. And instead of profiting by the delay, far from being touched by God's patience, how many sinners are there who take advantage of it only to multiply their misdeeds! They plunge more

and more deeply into vice; they heap sin upon sin; the measure of their iniquity is not known even to themselves. And God's anger goes on ever increasing, each one of their faults swells the torrent of the Divine vengeance. What, then, can stem this torrent? What power can arrest the arm of this infinitely just God? His own infinite patience will achieve this marvel. So just is the Divine anger that, to hinder its action, a greater miracle is required than to prevent a burning furnace from consuming what is cast into it. But the patience of God can work even this miracle; it alone is able to restrain His infinite justice, so grievously provoked. And this, as St. Paul says, is the masterpiece of Divine Omnipotence. *Deus volens ostendere iram, et notam facere potentiam suam sustinuit in multa patientia vasa iræ, apta in interitum* (God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction—Rom. ix. 22).

303. Why, then, does He tarry, but in order that He may forgive? For the exercising of His mercy, His patience holds back the arm of His justice, and this infinite loving-kindness of God touches our hearts above all His other perfections, and fills us with admiration and confidence. How can we do other than adore God's willingness to pardon, when we reflect upon the shame, the ingratitude, the insolence, of sin? And for the most part it is not one sin alone that God pardons; it is a long series of grave faults—the blackest, it may be, the most horrible, that can be committed; for, however numerous may be the sins, however great they may appear, the Divine compassion is always greater. Often, too, the sinner who sues for pardon has already abused a hundred times the Divine mercy. A hundred, a thousand times he has been forgiven; he has promised not to fall back again, and he has fallen anew; he has violated his promises and insulted God's goodness again and again. And yet God is not weary; He has accorded His pardon a hundred times, a

thousand times; He pardons still; and as often as the sinner renews an act of sincere repentance, so often will he be again forgiven.

And God does not delay this forgiveness for an instant. As soon as the guilty soul expresses its repentance, He restores to it His grace; and, as though this were not sufficient, God, in His infinite goodness, has deigned to institute a Sacrament whereby pardon is yet more easily obtained, and which, applying the merits of the Precious Blood to the soul, instantly effaces the faults even of those whose love and contrition are still weak and imperfect.

304. For God's infinite mercy is not satisfied merely by replying to the first cry of the soul that implores His pardon; He does much more than this. He anticipates this rebellious soul's repentance; He forestalls it; He offers it the pardon of which, without His aid, it would not so much as dream; He instils into it remorse and a salutary fear; He inundates it with all kinds of graces, interior and exterior, that He may lead it to regret its fault, to ask and to obtain its reconciliation.

Then, when He has pardoned the sin, God straightway remembers it no more. He does not wish that the memory of the past should check the outpouring of His benefits; and the Magdalens, the Augustines will be able to receive as many graces as the most innocent souls, and may become great and illustrious Saints.

And when He thus forgives, God does not merely say to the sinner, "Thy sin is remitted; thou shalt not be punished for it," but He adds: "I restore all that thou didst lose by sin—all the blessings which thou didst renounce, the merits which thou didst possess before thy fall." God gives to the repentant sinner what, of himself, he would never have dared to ask, restoring him to the privileges of a son, and returning to dwell in that heart whence He had been so shamefully driven forth.

And after so many proofs of goodness—proofs for which the pardoned sinner can never be sufficiently grateful—

God acts towards him as though He were in His creature's debt. In craving forgiveness, the sinner has only done his duty, consulted his own interests, and yielded to the promptings of grace. And yet God counts all this to him for righteousness; He recompenses him for having implored His pardon, as though it were an act of pure virtue.

Then, when He has accomplished all these marvels of goodness and mercy, God's joy overflows. This Good Shepherd, who has pursued the ungrateful sheep with His love, calls all creatures to Him: "Rejoice with Me," He says, "for I have found the sheep that was lost."

Well may the Psalmist praise this Divine compassion! The earth is indeed filled with His mercies! *Misericordia Domini plena est terra;* all eternity will not suffice to extol it worthily: *Misericordias Domini in æternum cantabo.*

§ 5. *God is the Necessary Being—Simple, Immutable, Eternal.*

305. We have attempted to show what God is in His relations with His creatures; let us now consider Him as He is in Himself. Let us study His intrinsic perfections. If we arrive at a proper understanding of God's attributes, we shall have a more just idea of Him, and we shall see how He differs essentially from all created beings.

Every created thing is contingent merely; it might not have existed. A hundred years ago where were we? The world could continue to be and to revolve without us. Where was the world itself some thousands of years ago? We are not necessary; there is nothing necessary in us; for we can change, and everything about us might have been quite different.

God is the necessary Being. Had He not been, nothing else could have been; no other being would have existed. Existence belongs to Him necessarily; He cannot be deprived of it; it is impossible to imagine His not possess-

ing it, impossible that a time could have ever been when He was without it, impossible that He could lose it. But as for us, we were possible beings before we became actual beings; we can conceive of our essence, our nature, independently of our existence. With God, nature and existence are one; the one implies the other. If He does not exist, then no Divine nature is possible; if a Divine nature is possible, then it exists.

306. God is necessary, such as He is: He must needs have all that He has, for who could give it to Him if He had it not? What He has not is pure nothing. He has, then, all Being, necessarily and eternally; there is nothing in Him to-day which has not been there for all time, not a thought, not a new expression of will.

To act is more perfect than to be able to act. We are more perfect to-day, now that we act, than when as children we possessed this faculty in the germ only, without producing any acts. To think, or to will, is more than to be able to think or to will. But in God there is no increase of perfection, no acquisition, no production possible—no new actions. He acts always, and always in the same way.

God's mode of action differs from ours, where several faculties act successively. First we comprehend, then we will; the act of will succeeds to the act of intelligence. In the sovereignly perfect Being it cannot be thus; in Him there has been never a faculty that slept, that ceased even momentarily from action. In God the faculty is one with the act, and as there is no sequence of acts, there is no distinction of faculties. Or, to put it better, there is no faculty; there is only the act. Or, better still, God is act, pure act. As St. Thomas says: "He is all action, and an action that is always identical. He is all activity, and the activity is always the same."

307. From this it follows that God is essentially simple; there are no dimensions in Him, no composition, no parts. Incomparably more simple than the Angels, in whom we

distinguish various faculties, the will differing from the intelligence, action differing from substance, grace from nature, all that God is, He is simultaneously—goodness and justice, strength and wisdom, will and operation ; He is one single, ineffable reality.

In our language and in our thoughts we are obliged to create differences in God ; we distinguish certain things ; but this is only because we cannot understand so simple a Being ; such an absolute simplicity eludes us, and is beyond us.

When, therefore, we say that God is good, God is beautiful, God is just, that God creates, preserves, and governs, we express these verities as perfectly as the human language is capable of expressing them ; or, rather, we express divers aspects of the same one eternal truth. But the expression remains very imperfect. These perfections, in fact, are not distinct in God, as they are distinct in the creature ; they are but one and the same perfection, which, moreover, is nowise distinct from God Himself. So that to speak of " the perfection of God " is to use an inadequate and incorrect expression. God is all His perfection, and this in a manner so simple that we can neither conceive nor express it. In the same way God acts when He creates, preserves and governs, when He recompenses and chastises ; and we perceive different actions because the results are different, but the action in itself is always identical. The light of the sun is pleasant to the healthy eye, but is a cause of suffering to the diseased ; its heat causes one plant to germinate, another to grow, while it withers and kills a third ; here it sucks up the water from the rivers and the seas, there, by the storms that it creates, it is the cause of torrential rains. Would it be said that the sun acts differently in these various circumstances ? The results are different according to the various dispositions of the beings affected by its influence, but the emanations from the solar orb are always of the same nature. And thus, although the effects are infinitely diverse, the Divine

action that produces them is always the same; and, further, it is not distinct from the perfections of which we spoke above, it is not distinct from God Himself; and to say "the action of God" is to speak as imperfectly as to say "the goodness," "the wisdom of God." God is the essentially incomprehensible Being, the essentially inexpressible.

308. From this simplicity of the Supreme Being proceeds His immutability.

All the changes in His creatures are due to His influence. He is, as has been said, the great Motive Power. All motion comes from Him, as the Apostle tells us: *In ipso vivimus, movemur et sumus* (In Him we live and move and are—Acts xvii. 28). And is God who thus aids every creature to act and move, also subject to movement and change? Not so; He continues for ever the same: *Immotus in Te permanens* (Thyself unmoved, all motion's source). While under His action all things in Nature change: the plants that germinate and grow, that ripen and fade; the living creatures that are born and develop, grow old and die; the souls in whom thoughts and sentiments succeed each other with such rapidity—God, who rules over all these changes, is subject to no change. *Ego Dominus et non mutor—mutabis eos et mutabuntur, tu autem idem ipse es.*

And wherefore should He change? He can acquire no new perfections, because He possesses them all; no knowledge, for all knowledge is His from all eternity. God is eternal truth, eternal beauty, perfect truth, perfect goodness; and can the perfect change? God is the essentially simple Being, and how can He therefore change? *Apud quem non est transmutatio, nec vicissitudinis obumbratio* ("In whom there is no change or shadow of alteration," says Holy Scripture—Jas. i. 17), In God, then, there is neither increase nor decrease; no change of place, since He is everywhere; no change of knowledge, since His wisdom is eternal and infinite; no change of feeling, since

He is infinitely good; no change of years, since He is eternal.

309. God is eternal. He had no beginning, and if we would count the number of His years, the imagination loses itself, thought becomes confused; however high it may ascend, it finds itself confronted by illimitable space. A million years ago God had existed then from all eternity. Go farther back into the mists of the ages—thousands of millions of years, thousands of millions of centuries—and still has God existed from all eternity. Force the imagination backward as many centuries as there are seconds in the ages that we have just imagined, and still we find God existing from all eternity. And although we should pass our entire lives in making these calculations, multiplying the æons thus, however appalling the figure to which we may attain, we shall still be infinitely far from eternity.

So much for the past, and the eternity to come is no less unfathomable. In order to give some slight idea of this eternity, various hypotheses have been resorted to. Suppose, they say, that a bird passed by the earth, and brushed it with its wing once in a thousand years, it would be worn completely away before eternity had so much as begun.

What, then, is eternity? St. Gregory has well said that we know as little of eternity as the blind man of the light.

310. And that which, above all else, we do not comprehend, that which is for us a deep and adorable mystery, is the simplicity of the Divine eternity. It endures for ever, and is all one with the present moment. For us, poor limited creatures, who are subject to the law of time, life is composed of a succession of moments, the course of which we are powerless to arrest. Hour succeeds to hour, minute to minute, second to second. Existence is dealt out to us drop by drop; each joy or each sorrow is made up of joyful or sorrowful moments, which pass with a rapidity that we can neither accelerate nor retard. And we have the past, the memory of which we retain, the future, which

is not yet with us ; and the present, so brief, so fugitive, which alone belongs to us.

For God there is neither past nor future ; all is present. " Oh, my God," cries St. Augustine, " in Thy years there is neither going nor coming, for coming they drive not away those that pass. Thy years are all even as one. They are as a single day, a to-day knowing neither yesterday nor to-morrow, and *that* to-day is eternity." God, therefore, remembers nothing ; He foresees nothing. He sees at one glance all times, which to Him are the present. When we say, " God has created ; God will judge," we only express ourselves in accordance with the exigencies of our human conceptions ; but our language is necessarily imperfect and faulty ; it fails to give the ineffable reality of the Divine eternity—the eternity which, as Boëtius says, is *the total possession, simultaneous and perfect, of a life that never ends.*

311. To sum up, all that we conceive, all that we say of God, falls infinitely short of the reality. If He revealed Himself to us we should still be powerless to convey this knowledge to others, and the most eulogistic terms that we could utter would, when applied to Him, be so far below the truth as to seem only so many blasphemies and insults. As the celebrated author of *De Mystica Theologia* has so admirably said : " God is neither soul nor mind ; He possesses neither imagination, judgment, reason, nor understanding ; He is neither word nor thought, nor can He either be named or understood. He is neither number nor order, greatness nor littleness, inequality nor equality, likeness nor unlikeness. He is not motionless ; He is neither in movement nor in repose. He has not power, and is neither power nor light. He lives not, and He is not life. He is neither essence, nor eternity, nor time. There is no perception in Him. He is not knowledge, truth, empire, or wisdom ; He is not one, neither is He unity, divinity, nor goodness ; He is not spirit, as we understand spirits ; He is neither sonship, nor paternity, *nor any of those things which can be understood by ourselves or by others.*

He is nothing of that which is not, nothing even of that which is. No existing thing knows Him as He is. In Him is neither word, nor name, nor knowledge; He is neither darkness nor light, error nor truth. Neither must we make absolute affirmation nor absolute negation concerning Him, and in affirming or in denying those things that are inferior to Him we cannot affirm or deny Him, *because this perfect and unique Cause of all beings surpasses all our affirmations, and He, who is wholly independent of and superior to all creatures, surpasses all our negations.*"[1]

§ 6. *The Most Holy Trinity.*

312. The higher we ascend in the consideration of the Divine greatness, the more impotent does language become; a silent adoration is more fitting than a wealth of words; this is why we shall enlarge but little upon the adorable Mystery of the Holy Trinity.

Tres sunt qui testimonium dant in cœlo, Pater, Verbum et Spiritus Sanctus, et hi tres unum sunt (There are three who give testimony in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one—1 St. John v. 7).

We can conceive of nothing so marvellously simple as the Divine nature, but this nature, simple to the point of having no different faculties, nor even distinct acts of these faculties, is common to three Divine Persons. The Father, ineffable source of knowledge and of love, source of all the Divinity, is this Divinity Itself. Without any loss of this Divine Being He communicates it to the Word, and the Father and the Word, while suffering no loss or diminution of their nature, communicate it to the Holy Spirit. The Divine nature possessed by the Father is admirably simple, but the same Divine nature is also possessed by the Son in its absolute simplicity, and it is possessed in the same manner by the Holy Spirit. All that we have said of the Divine nature is common to the three Divine Persons.

[1] *De Mystica Theologia*, Chap. v.

The Father does not act independently of the Son, nor the Father and the Son independently of the Holy Spirit ; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit create, preserve, and govern the world by one single act, an act not distinct from their nature, by that act which is God Himself. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are not three parts of God ; they are the same God, simple, one, indivisible. They are not distinct substances ; they are not distinct operations ; they are distinct and subsisting relations.

313. God the Father knows Himself, and knowing Himself He brings forth within Him a perfect image of Himself. When I stand before a mirror I produce, whether I will or no, an extremely faithful image of myself, but one that is outside of me. When I think of myself, when I say the word "me" to myself, I also produce, but this time inwardly, an extremely faithful image ; and this image, which is my thought, is distinct from me, but it is in me.

And God the Father, knowing Himself, utters an interior word, *Verbum*, which is the faithful image of Himself ; this Word is within Him ; it is infinitely like unto Him, for He perfectly knows Himself. There is a relation between the Father knowing Himself thus and thereby producing His interior utterance—His Word, and the infinite utterance, the perfect image of God in His self-knowledge—the Word of God ; these two distinct relations of the same nature are two Divine Persons. The Person who produces is the Father ; He brings forth a Son. Now, the essence of generation is to produce a being like to him by whom he is engendered, and as the word—that is to say, the interior word—is necessarily the image of the being thought of, the Eternal Father in producing His Word gives birth to a Person necessarily resembling Himself. Who can conceive the perfection of this second Person of the Blessed Trinity—living utterance, infinite knowledge, uncreated wisdom, supreme intelligence, in whom all things are contained ?

314. The Father and the Son love one another. The love of God's nature is not an image ; love is a sigh, a

breath. "Love speaks not, love breaks not out into song, love utters no cry, but it exhales itself in a burning breath in which the whole soul passes forth."[1] The Father and the Son in this mutual love produce, not another Son, but a Divine sigh, a Divine breath—which is the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit, that personal love of the Father and of the Son, is not the act of love; He is the Fruit of love. The Father and the Son love one another by their actual essence; there is a relation between these two Persons exhaling their love and the love that they produce, and the term of this love is a Divine Person; it is the Holy Ghost. But God *is* His love, even as he *is* His intelligence; love and intelligence are not distinct from His essence; love, then, produces in God a Divine Person, but this Person, distinct from the other two Persons, has the same nature, and is the same God. How can we form an idea of this love which is God, this love of an infinite depth, extent, and power, a sea of love at once vehement and calm, which wells up, as it were, from the Divinity, like a vast, burning, living flood of lava flowing from an infinite, limitless crater; a flood, rather, which never issues forth, but continues in God, for it is God Himself.

315. Such is the mystery of the processions in the Blessed Trinity, and these processions are eternal. The self-knowledge, the self-contemplation of God are eternal; eternally He speaks to Himself this interior word, this infinite Word which expresses all His greatness, all His perfections, all His Being; this infinite Word which expresses all His power, His designs so full of wisdom and goodness towards all His creatures. In this Divine Word I am thought of, and all those round about me, all that has ever happened, or will happen, in the ages to come, though not with an abundance of thoughts and words, for there is but one only thought, one only word. God knows all things and sees all things in knowing and seeing Himself, and the utterance by which His Divine Being is expressed

[1] Monsatré, 10th Conference, Lent, 1874.

says and expresses all things. This is the eternal intercourse of the Divine Persons, an intercourse that is perfect and inexhaustible ; an infinitely joyful intercommunication, of which they can never weary.

316. To God and to God alone is all honour and glory due, and the glory due to God is given to Him according to the fulness of His merits. The three Divine Persons glorify themselves mutually ; they recognize their common perfections ; they admire them, and praise them as they deserve to be praised.

317. God contemplates Himself eternally, He loves Himself eternally. He loves Himself with an infinite love, for He perceives His infinite loveliness, and loves Himself as fully as He deserves to be loved. He loves Himself, and loving Himself He loves all the participations of His adorable Being, of His infinite perfections ; in loving Himself He loves all creatures according to their resemblance to Him. *Ipse prior dilexit nos.* He loved us first, before we had done anything to merit this love ; He loves us with an eternal love : *caritate perpetua dilexi te.*

He loves Himself, and His love, like all love, tends to union. Between the three Divine Persons there is an infinite need of union, and this need is entirely and always satisfied. No closer union could be imagined ; the Father is in the Son and in the Holy Spirit, the Son is in the Father and in the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is in the Father and in the Son ; not in the manner of the thing contained, which is in the thing containing it, for the container and the contained are distinct with a distinction of nature, but in a manner far more intimate and truly ineffable, for these three Divine Persons have the same nature. They can produce nothing from without ; they can will nothing but by one act, one single will and operation.

318. And from this union, this complete possession of themselves, ever infinitely desired and infinitely obtained, results a happiness that knows no bounds, a mutual delight, a jubilation, a transport of joy inexpressible.

Because of the love of the three Persons one for another, they wish each other an infinite happiness, and in giving themselves mutually one to another, they procure for one another this infinite happiness. The Father is infinitely happy at the sight of the infinite happiness of His Divine Son and of the Spirit of Love, and each of the Divine Persons therefore enjoys the felicity of the other two.

Nothing can disturb or diminish this happiness. We can say with all truth that God rejoices in our good works, but we cannot with any propriety say that He is saddened at our faults; the least shadow of sadness would cloud His happiness, and no sadness is possible with God.

God is the Being who is infinitely knowable, knowing infinitely, infinitely known. God is the Being to whom an infinite glory is due, and to whom an infinite glory is rendered. God is the Being who is infinitely lovable, infinitely loving, infinitely loved. God is the Being who is infinitely happy. Such is God, such is the Thrice Holy and a thousand times adorable Trinity. "Oh, God," chants the Church, "Father unbegotten, Thee the only-begotten Son, Thee the Holy Ghost, the Paraclete, Thee the Holy and undivided Trinity, to Thee be glory for ever and ever, Amen.[1]

[1] Office of the Blessed Trinity.

THE END

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